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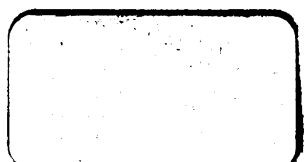
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Frank Lyle.

Dec 1897.

BRAEFOOT SKETCHES

Braefoot Sketches

BY

J. MACKINNON



ALEXANDER GARDNER

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—BRAEFOOT,	9
II.—BRAEFOOT (<i>continued</i>),	17
III.—JEAMES NICOL BUSY,	27
IV.—SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE MERCHANT'S,	37
V.—THE BREAKING OF TIBBIE NICOL'S WINDOW,	46
VI.—THE TROUBLES OF BETTY SHANK, ...	55
VII.—FAIRIES,	65
VIII.—AT THE SOUTER'S,	75
IX.—EXPELLED,	83
X.—DURING A SPATE,	94
XI.—A FRIENDLY MATCH,	108
XII.—A "FORENIGHT" IN THE WINTER TIME,	118
XIII.—FISHING,	128
XIV.—STRIK'-ME-DEAD,	138
XV.—THE DESTROYERS OF LIFE AND PRO- PERTY,	147
XVI.—A VISIT TO WEELUM CUSHNY'S, ...	155
XVII.—A SABBATH MORNING WITH SAN'ERS WHITE,	163
XVIII.—AT THE SCHOOL,	172
XIX.—EXIT JOHNNIE CLAPPERTON, ...	182
XX.—HOW ROB MACLAGGAN AND GEORDIE MACINTAGGART CAME BY THEIR LIMPS,	189

BRAEFoot.



CHAPTER I.

Braefoot.

IF a friend had come to see you, and you wanted to show him Braefoot, you took him up to the top of the castle brae. Then the village—a St. Andrew's cross of thatched houses—lay at his feet. The sight would not rouse his enthusiasm; but men, women, and children lived and died in that little collection of mean tenements as well as in the great city. His eyes would be drawn to the Square, which in fact was a rhomboid, by three towering poplars. The Square was the centre of Braefoot, the body out of which the attenuated limbs of the cross grew. It was the centre of its trade also. Over the door of one of its houses there was a sign—"The Harrow Inn." The Harrow Inn cat, when chased by a dog, would rush for the front door, and if it happened

to be shut, would pop out of sight in beneath it, the freestone doorstep was so well worn.

"Ay," Sandy Macwhirter, the souter, once remarked, as he pointed to that much-worn stone, "the constant drappie."

Merchant Price's shop was in the Square. Merchant Price was considered a man with a good head—by himself. His chief end was to make things pay. "Job," he said, "wis nae man at a'. We read aboot 'im ha'ein' a thoosan' she-asses. Noo, wouldn't it 'av' been a hantle mair wiselike o' 'im if he'd selt sic a mardal o' eesless beas' an' bocht kye, an' sent the milk intae the Lon'on market. It wad hae peyed 'im better." When he got in a cask of paraffin, he measured it out gallon by gallon into a stock cask to see if it "tallied wi' the inwice." "My last cask o' ile turned oot gran', man," he would say. "It wis inwiced forty gallons, an' hoo muckle think ye did it measure oot. Jeist exac'ly forty gallons, a bottle, an' aboot half a tea cuppiefu'. That peys."

Sandy Macwhirter, the souter, also lived in the Square. The souter had "a wy o' takin' fowk aff," and a faculty for remarking things. His shop was the headquarters of everybody who played at draughts, and if you wanted to hear what was doing you went to Macwhirters. Being

a philosopher, he denounced drinking, and took a dram. Of course there were those who hinted that he had "had his ain share in the wearin' oot o' the Harrow Inn doorstep." He sat in his shop from morning till night making boots—and remarks. Seeing a slight gentleman pass the window, he would say, "Finç leg for the kilt," or "The win'll nae haud yon birkie agin." "Dyod," he would say, "fatna famished-lookin' baigle o' a fellow wis yon at gaed doon through the toon the day, ken ye? He lookit as gin he'd sma' stanes in the heels o's boots." "Fatna waft-lookin' character's that?" "Faur did that lang, dirty, hungry, scrawpit-lookin' tangle o' a chap come oot o'?"

Andrew Peat's smithy was likewise in the Square. From the post-office, in one of the corners, letters were delivered by William Thriest, postmaster, as a great obligation. In another corner stood the Auld Kirk—slated. The druggist's shop was also in the Square. In the dark nights the loons used to congregate about the druggist's window. Its bright light streamed across the Square and up the wall of the house opposite. I mind standing one dark night at the corner of the Auld Kirk. About half a score of loons were round the druggist's window. Wangie

Lowrie came running up to them out of the darkness.

"Ha! ha! tho'," said he, "bit I've a hoast."

Then he made a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to cough.

"Faur ye gyan, Wangie?"

"Intae the drogist's tae buy candie sugar."

When he came out of the shop—

"O, gi'es a bittie, Wangie."

"No, A'll nae. It's for my hoast."

"O, Wangie! ye ken me, Wangie."

"Hoo muckle did ye buy, Wangie?"

"A ha'penny's worth. A've a ha'penny yet."

"O, bit I'd fow'r pence fan I'd the mumps."

"Fat did ye spen't on?"

"A divna min' noo."

"A thocht that."

"Are ye gyan tae play at 'cock in the winda,' Wangie?"

"No A'm nae. A'm gyan awa' hame."

"Gyang then."

Wangie disappeared into the darkness.

"Wangie's richt stocherty."

"Ay, he'll niver gi'e ye a bit o' naething."

"A'll watch him again. A'll seen be gettin' a penny fae my father."

"A'm gettin' a penny on Setturday."

"Fa fae?"

"Fae oor Geordie."

"Na! na!"

"O, bit a'! a'!"

"Fat for daein'?"

"Never ye ound fat for daein'."

"O, A kent ye wisna gettin't."

"Bit A am sot gettin't. Surely A ken better gin you."

"It's a' lees. It's a' lees. It's a' lees. Haud yer tongue."

"No, A'll nae haud my tongue. Fat div ye—"

"Fa's gyan owre tae the smiddy?"

"Me." "An' me." "An' me."

So away they ran to the smithy, leaving the prospective possessor of the penny glowering disconsolately into the druggist's window.

Two burns ran down through Braefoot. The kirk burn cut the cross at the Square, and divided the village into two districts—up-the-toon and doon-the-toon. The back burn ran close by the doon-the-toon end of the village. Both came from the hills, and have been known to meet each other on the *streets*. Along the walls of the low-lying houses in the doon-the-toon end of the village there was a green water-mark about eighteen inches from the ground. Occasionally, in the end

of the year, some of the tenementers there stepped out of their warm beds in the morning into a foot and a half of water. When there was a flood, the bairns would be kept at home from school, and their mothers would tell them a story about a little boy who wouldn't do his mother's bidding, and stay in the house, and who, in consequence, fell into the burn and was carried away to the Swift and drowned. Older people would stand in twos and threes here and there, with their hands in their pockets, looking at the burns. Those who had houses on their banks would fidget about with anxious faces as they ruefully saw their bulwarks giving way to the waters. It was a fine sight from the top of the straight brae to see the burns gone mad with the flood, and spurning the curb of their banks as they galloped furiously onwards to the swollen river.

Dwellers in the up-the-toon end of the village never suffered from the floods.

Juvenile up-the-tooners used to play cricket-matches against the juvenile doon-the-tooners on the market-green. These matches began in great good humour, "chising for the bat." One of the opposing captains thumped the other on the back, saying, "A finger, or a finger, or a thumb, thumb, thumb." If the guesser guessed rightly, his team

went to the bat ; if wrongly, his opponent's team went. Very soon the bowler would shout—

“ Hoo's that, empire ? ”

The startled umpire would say “ Out.”

“ A'm naething o' the kin' oot.”

“ Ye wis l.b.w.”

“ A wis naething o' the kin' l.b.w.”

“ Oot ye go ; the empire says ye wis oot.”

But as a rule the batsman would not go. He would stick to the bat, and threaten to break the legs of anybody who interfered with him. Sometimes a Village Hampden would clutch hold of the bat, and there would be a fight, which would generally last till a nose was bled. I have rarely seen a boy's fight pass the nose-bleeding point. The sight of blood strikes terror into the hearts of the combatants. The victim runs home “ greetin',” while the blood-spiller skulks away, saying, “ It wisna me 'at began't.” Thus the match would be hoaxed, and the end of it would be the rival teams stoning each other from a safe distance.

There were generally three or four cricket-clubs in Braefoot, and it was not an unusual thing to see the loons coming home from the market-green, one with three stumps, one with a bat, and one with a ball, because the club had been “ broken up.” The breaking up of a club generally began

with the treasurer having pocketfuls of peas and locust-beans. A subscription-list would then go round the village, beginning at the manses, and a new club would soon be started.

The Free Kirk was situated in the doon-the-toon half of the cross, and "Daft" Jock never spoke of it but with contempt. He referred to it as the "henhoose," because its main couples were visible. Jock believed himself a pillar of the Auld Kirk. He occasionally did orra jobs at the Auld Kirk manse, and was right-hand man to Tammas Winter, Auld Kirk beadle and gravedigger. Jock died suddenly. Some of the neighbours were officiating at his mother's lyke-wake, and Jock, who was in bed in the same room, was supposed to be asleep. The conversation turned on Jock, and they were wondering what was to become of him.

"God tak' me," said Jock.

He was dead before the morning.

CHAPTER II.

Braefoot (continued).

ALTHOUGH the bitter depth of Disruption feeling had considerably disappeared at the time of which I write, there was yet a distinct gulf between the Auld Kirk folk and the Free Kirk folk, and as Macwhirter was wont to remark, Mr. Black, the Auld Kirk minister, seldom "darkened coonsel" with Mr. Macwhittie, the Free Kirk minister. Free Kirkers never went to the Auld Kirk, nor did any member of Mr. Black's flock ever stray within the gates of Mr. Macwhittie's fold. Amongst the older folk, however, this feeling was for most part a passive one, and it only found active expression with the Auld Kirk loons who attended Mr. Bright's school up the brae, and the Free Kirk loons who attended the school attached to the Free Kirk. In the winter especially were they sworn foes, and many a snowball fight was indulged in. The field of battle was the straight brae. The Auld Kirk loons had the advantage of throwing down hill. They had also, as a rule, the aid of "Daft" Jock, who was a famous snowballer.

The Free Kirkers, however, faced the odds with grit. I have frequently seen one or other of the armies have to take refuge in the school, the door of which would be bombarded and battered until there was barely an inch of it visible for snow. One day at the dinner hour the Free Kirkers had been routed, and put to flight, and while they were struggling in at the school door, as if for dear life, a snowball sped over their heads and hit the schoolmaster who was standing within.

"Now, my boys," said the master in a passion, "I'll give you half an hour to chase these scoundrels up to their den."

The boys turned in a body, and once more opened fire on the enemy. The fight waxed fierce and fiercer, but soon the bell of Mr. Bright's school sounded the retreat, and the Auld Kirkers right-about wheeled and "skirted" off to their afternoon tasks, hotly pursued by the avenging Free Kirk host, who vigorously peppered them into their "den." The master waited long and impatiently for the return of his boys, but alas! he saw them not again until ten of the clock the following morning. Occasionally grown-up partisans would "for the fun o't" take part in these battles. Peter Tam, if he happened to be passing with his cart would cry "stan', wo, Betty," and run to the re-

inforcement of the Free Kirk army. Peter was a reputed worthy. Sandy Macwhirter summed up his character charitably enough in a remark to Tammas Lowrie.

"For a real doonricht leear,' said Sandy, "gi'e me oor frien' Peter Tam."

Mr. Macwhittie for some reason or other refused to officiate at Peter's third marriage, but Peter was not to be baulked, and one Sabbath morning stood up in the Kirk and proclaimed himself and Meggie Turner man and wife. When Meggie died he told Tammas Lowrie, the wright, that "if he didna mak' her coffin o' weel seasoned wud, he wad never gie him anither order." On the day of the burial he turned upon the same functionary and told him to "look knacky an' screw 'er up." Peter, like most folk of his character, was easily imposed upon. In those days brose-day—what day youth supped its fate from the brose bowl—was one of the festal customs highly honoured in Braefoot. Some young apprentices made Peter believe that they had collected money enough to buy a stirk to make brose for the whole population of the village. They wanted Peter, who, if you believed him, was a tip-top judge of cattle, to go to the market and make the purchase. Peter agreed.

"Ye couldna' lichtit upon a shuitiner han' than

myself," said he. "I've deen a bittie at the buyin' o' beas' in my time. Aul' Drummies wis gyan through the toon the ither week wi' a puckle nowt tae the market, an' says he tae me, 'Weel, Peter, fat's the wecht o' that lot?' So an' so, says I. He cam' back neist day specially tae see me. 'Weel Drummies,' says I, 'hoo did yer lottie turn oot?' 'Ye wis jeist within three pun' o' them, Peter,' says he. It's as fac's A'm here."

Peter was up at four o'clock in the morning to go to the market in the county town to buy the stirk, but the youth who was to accompany him with the money did not put in an appearance. Peter rapped, as he thought at the youth's window, and then laid his ear to a crack in one of the panes, because he was a little dull in the hearing.

"Fa's there?" cried a woman's shrill voice.

"Me."

"Fa's me."

"Peter Tam."

"Has onything come owre Meggie?"

"Na, na. Is Geordie up?"

"Na. Fat wad he dae up at this time o' day?"

"We wis gyan tae the market tae buy a stirk."

"Gweed preserve us, Peter! fat wis ye gyan tae dae wi' a stirk?"

"Mak' brose tae ye a' the morn."

"Hoot toot, Peter, gae 'wa' hame tae yer bed, the rascals hiv been drawin' yer leg."

"Scoonrels!" said Peter.

Peter once had a law-suit about the price of a field of turnips with Andrew Peat, the smith. He was to get the mountings of a cart as part of the price. A dispute arose about this part of the bargain, and Peter took the smith "afore the shirra."

"What about the mountings of the cart?" said the sheriff, who spoke in a low voice.

"He ate them, my lord," said Peter, who did not hear him distinctly, and thought he spoke of the turnips.

"What!" said the sheriff.

"Ay, he ate them, my lord," repeated Peter.

Andrew Peat was often afterwards twitted with this wonderful feat in gastronomy.

"Ay, smith, hiv ye gotten the mountin's?" was Macwhirter's "wy" of asking if he had had his dinner.

One of my brightest recollections of Braefoot is the berry treat. Once every year, on a summer's afternoon, the ministers took the Sunday School children up to their manses to feast them liberally on the good things of the material world. The attendance at school always bobbed up a Sabbath or two before the treat. It always bobbed down again

immediately after. For weeks before hand the loons practised running, jumping, etc. When the day came, the children, in their Sunday clothes, with their teachers and the minister, met—a picturesque group—at the kirk. A number of the boys were provided with long poles, on the top of which were huge bouquets of ferns and wild-flowers. Others had banners. A hymn was sung, and the children were ranged in marching order. They marched two and two each having hold of the others hand. The girls marched in front. It was a pretty sight to see them start away from the kirk, headed by the Braefoot brass band. How they hurrahed and waved their flowers, flags, and handkerchiefs! Fond mothers stood at doors and windows and admired them as they passed. When they arrived at the manse they were marched into a field where the sports were held. Then they were treated to a sumptuous tea on the lawn in front of the manse, after which the prizes for running, jumping, etc., were distributed. This over, they were allowed to play about till the evening sun lay yellow on the green moss which covered the top of the old castle, when they were ranged in front of the manse again, and each presented with a bagful of ripe gooseberries. Such gooseberries! The band then took them in tow, and

they were marched hurraing, etc., as before, from one end of the village to the other, and finally, to the kirk, where, after cheering the minister and the teachers, they were dismissed to their homes full of wonderful stories to tell to their mothers. I once heard Strike-me-dead's mother say that the sight of the bairnies made her sorry, but when I asked her why, she said she "didna ken."

The castle to which I have alluded, and which was merely a bit of the outer wall of the ancient Castle of Braefoot, stood on the brae on the other side of the kirk burn from Mr. Black's manse, and looked down upon the village. Children were frightened away from the castle. Their mothers told them that if they went near it "Jenny Hossack would snap them up." They told them this because they were afraid that in their play they might roll down the brae into the mill dam. It was from "Jenny Hossack" that the wives of Braefoot got all the babies.

"Mither," said Jackie Macwhirter, "Johnny Peat's gotten a new baby."

"Ay."

"He says it has red een like his rabbit."

"Weel, weel, than."

"A'm seekin' tae get a baby tae, mither,—a quinie ane."

"Ye'll need tae wait till I hae time tae gyang up tae the castle tae Jenny Hossack, then."

"Fan'll ye gyang, mither?"

"Ou, there's nae hurry."

"Is the babies' een open fan ye new get them fae Jenny Hossack, mither?"

"Run awa' an' nae bather me."

"Will ye gyang the morn, mither? A'm seekin' tae get a quinie baby as weel's Johnnie Peat."

"Tchoots gae 'wa' oot an' play yersel'."

But so much did Jackie want to be equal with Johnnie Peat in the baby line, that he mustered up courage enough to go to the castle himself in quest of a baby girl. He had often heard that the babies were sometimes to be seen running about the brae. He dallied about the castle till dusk, but alas! no glimpse of a baby rewarded his gallantry. Then he began to grow "fear't" and slunk home.

"Ay, my lad, faur hiv ye been till this time o' nicht," said his mother.

"Naewy."

Mistress Macwhirter lifted a stick.

"A wis up at the castle tryin' tae catch a baby," blubbered Jackie.

This answer turned away her wrath.

"An' did ye see ony?" said she.

“No, but A heard them squeakin’.”

In the winter Braefoot would sometimes be switched off from the outer world for a day or two at a time by a heavy snowstorm. Whenever there was a big fall of snow, one or two of the nearest farmers would make their way into the village, and generously go through the streets with their snow-ploughs. The villagers shovelled out tracks along the fronts of their houses, and made cuttings from their doors to the furrow in the middle of the street. I have seen the snow lying to such a depth that only the head and shoulders of a person could be seen while walking along the causeway. Jeames Nicol—Sweer Jeames—was never known to clear the snow away from the front of his tenement.

“It’ll gyang o’ its ain accoont fan the thowe comes,” he would remind his spouse Tibbie.

There was little to do in the winter time. The majority of the villagers had an acre or two of land, and lived by keeping a cow, a pig or two, and a few hens. Their chief recreation was in giving each other “forenichts.” The loons, however, kept the drowsy village from sleeping outright. They had snowball fights. They made sledges, and kept the pot aboiling from the top of the straight brae down to the street. They made

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girns, and set riddles, and caught blackbirds, chaffinches, etc. They hollowed out large turnips for lanterns, and cut holes in them to represent the eyes, nose, and mouth of a monster, and in the dark nights stuck them on to the top of the gate at the foot of Betty Shanks' yard, because they knew that Betty always went to the byre in the dark. And many other things did they do—

“ Never, never petting,
About the frozen time.”

Braefoot lay in the lap of wooded hills, looking up to the heights of Ben Alder, and listening to the song of the rushing Swift as it swept downwards on its way from the Highlands to the sea. It was, as I have said, but a little collection of mean tenements, yet, withal, it was a beautiful spot, dear to many affectionate hearts, and inexpressedly dear to mine.

CHAPTER III.

Jeames Nicol Busy.

"THERE'S aye some watter faur the stirkie droons." That is a truth which no amount of scientific research, no ultimate accumulation of facts, can ever alter by the merest jot. It is a truth for all time. I am therefore obliged to believe that those who called Jeames Nicol "Sweer Jeames," had at least some reason for doing so.

"Fat does Jeames dae?" asked a stranger who once played him a game of draughts in Mac-whirter's.

"His wife keeps a coo," replied some one, who of course knew all about it.

But Jeames, as well as the devil, deserves his due, and I have known him to have had a busy day of it. I will, therefore, in justice to his memory, record the fact.

One morning Jeames rose at eight o'clock, and to mark her appreciation of this departure, Tibbie "put a hack in the crook," also she "dootit it wadna keep fair till even." Jeames, I am safe to say, had never once thought of the meteorological

effect of his early rising, but even if he had, he would not at this moment have dallied to discuss it. He addressed himself to what was much more to his inclination—the despatch of a plateful of porridge, which stood offering up an appetising incense from the breakfast-table. Indeed, so much was this sort of thing to his inclination that he developed a noticeable rotundity amidships, a word which one of the carriers imported from Riversmouth the day after a wreck.

“Jeames is getherin’ a corporation,” remarked Merchant Price.

“Ay,” said Macwhirter, “Jeames is comin’ tae the front.”

When Jeames had supped his porridge, he kindled his pipe, put his hands into his trousers pockets, where he always carried them, and sallied forth to his day’s work. Jeames regarded this mode of carrying one’s hands as the hall-mark of a man of method. Having them in his pockets, he knew where to find them when he wanted them, and from there he could bring them into action without the slightest loss of valuable time, as he did when little Wangie Lowrie ran in over to him and, pointing to where the observant Macwhirter had noticed him coming to the front, asked, “Fat hiv ye a’ in there?”

To begin with, Jeames went round to the back of the house to look at the pig. This was no easy task. The pig, as pigs sometimes will, had breakfasted a trifle sumptuously, and had judiciously retired to sleep off the surfeit. Buried in the warm depths of a comfortable bed of russet brackens, the pig absolutely refused to be seen. Some people when they do not want to be disturbed in their sanctums, instruct their servants to tell callers that they are not at home; pigs merely and bluntly refuse to be seen. I have weighed the matter carefully, and must own that I prefer the pig's way. Jeames sat for a long time on the sty, crying "Chat, chat, chat," but the pig was obdurate. At length he concluded that entreaty was all in vain. He had often been in a similar mood himself, and knew the feeling. He also knew from experience what was generally resorted to in such circumstances, so he armed himself with the garden-rake, dragged the thick blanket of brackens off the protesting pig, and gave it a dig in the ribs which sent it "bowfing" and galloping round the sty.

"Ye should rise fan ye're bidden, then," said Jeames, which sounds very much like an echo of what he himself had been accustomed to hear. The pig, now thoroughly alert, consented to an

interview, and Jeames stayed for a considerable time vigorously "clawing" its back. When he had finished this job, he turned his steps and attention to the byre, which was as clean and tidy as a byre could be. Tibbie herself dealt with this department every morning after milking the cow. Jeames superintended. No time was lost over this job. Having seen that the byre was to his mind, he returned to the mouth of the lane, and leaned up against the corner of the house to consider his next effort.

"That's Jeames Nicol stan'in' at his fav'rite corner," said Bella Lowrie, who was sitting on the edge of the table looking out at the window, to her mother, who was busy washing the dishes. "He is a sweer deevil. It's a won'er tae me 'at Tibbie ever mairit that man. A dinna ken fat in the worl' she cud hae seen in sic a lazy sclype o' a chiel. He niver does a han's turn 'imself, but hauds her tearin' an' slavin' at a'thing. She's owre idle. My certy, if it wis me, I'd let 'im whussle. If I'd a man like that, see, mither, I'd gar 'im mak' his ain meat, brush his ain beets, an' dae his ain washin'. Ugh! I'd bide in a hoosie by mysel', like Betty Shanks, wi' a cat, afore I'd be tied tae a slooter o' a man o' that kin'. He's stan'in' there wi's pipe in's cheek an's han's in's pooches,

glowerin' at the street as if it was a newspaper 'at he wis readin'."

All this time Jeames was busy coming to a decision. Two jobs lay to his hands, and he had great difficulty in deciding which of them he would lay his hands to. The cow had to be "flitted," for this was washing-day with Tibbie, and Macwhirter, who had accidentally worsted him at draughts, had to be disabused of the idea that he was therefore now a match for Jeames Nicol. Jeames felt that the latter job was the more pressing, but he had begun the day well, and the consequent leverage afforded to well-doing helped him to decide, after a heavy bout of reasoning, in favour of "flitting" the cow. So away he went for that purpose.

"He's awa' noo, mither," said Bella, "up tae Macwhirter's, nae doot tae play draughts."

"Jeames held away down through the fields. He came upon Peter Tam busy digging potatoes.

"Ay, Peter."

"Ay."

"Big crap?"

"Beats a'. A lost coont efter fifty-fow'r at the last stem."

"Man! man!"

"It's as fac's A'm here."

"Fat kin' o' taties hiv ye grown this year!"

"Rocks."

"Man, Peter, A've aye thocht it a richt peety 'at we cudna growe chappit anes."

"They wad be yawfu' handy," said Peter.

"Yawfu' nicht o' thun'er an' lichtnin' the streen," continued Peter.

"Ay. A heard some mighty rum'les."

"Did ye see ony flashes?"

But Jeames had heard the cow "rootin'," and had moved off. It was a bright warm day in the end of August, what time the leas are mainly "gosks" and tanzies. Jeames reached and flitted the cow, and then sat down upon the green grass amid the golden tanzies to take a rest. White clouds sailed across the blue sky overhead like argosies on the summer seas, and all around the mirth of the coming harvest began to be mooted by the sportive winds in the fields of rustling corn. Jeames sat redding his pipe with a "sodger." Scarcely had he got it into good working trim when weariness, backed by the heat of the sun, thoroughly overcame him, and stretched him on the green sward asleep. He dreamed of an El Dorado where the houses were built of mashed potatoes. But alas! the 12.30 p.m. train cruelly whistled him back from that better land—back to the "gosks" and tanzies. Looking up he saw the

train coming slowly round the bend and Tibbie hastening towards him for the cow.

"Gweed be aboot me, Jeames," said Tibbie, "ye've surely been sleepin'."

"Na, A wis thinkin'."

"It's a peety," said his spouse to herself, "'at ye wadna think o' daein' something."

Jeames followed Tibbie and the cow home. He had now worked for and was "sair needin'" his dinner.

After that welcome meal, which, to his great delight, was "chappit taties an' milk," Jeames once again kindled his pipe, put his hands into his trousers pockets, and went out to his work. He leaned up against the corner of the house as in the morning, and continued to do so for a considerable time. Then he moved away up the street, landed in Macwhirter's, and sat down on Sandy's spare stool.

"Ay, Sandy."

"Ay."

Then the souter heeled a pair of boots. He must have forgotten that he had company, for when Jeames spoke again he started.

"Man, Sandy, A got a richt wowst the day fae Peter Tam aboot's taties."

"Ay."

"Ay, he tell't me he lost coont efter saxty-fower at ae stem."

"That's like 'im. He's a bricht ane, Peter. Ye wisna in fan he wis tellin's aboot catchin' the lichtnin'?"

"Na, fat wis that?"

"Ou, it wis last nicht, the time o' the thun'er. He wis tryin' tae gar's believe 'at he ance richt near catch'd a flash o' lichtnin' in a pig (jar). He wis wantin', he said, tae see fat it wis really made o'. So ae yawfu' nicht o' thun'er an' lighnin' he got haud o' a wire, an' put ae en' o't intae the pig an' the ither en' o't oot at the tap o' the winda. He hadna muckle mair nor deen't, he said, fan aboot sax feet o' lichtnin' flashed in at the winda, doon the wire, an' intae the pig. He tried tae cork it in, but had forgotten tae cut a natch for the wire, an' couldna get the cork tae work. He fumm'lt awa' for a filie tryin' tae get in the cork, but it wis nae eese. A' the time the lichtnin' wis furlin' roon an' roon aboot at the bottom o' the pig. At last it escapit oot atween his fingers an' boltit oot at the keyhole intae the gairden, whaur he lost sicht o't. He's certain he wad 'av' had it if he'd only gotten the cork tae work richt."

"That's aboot as good's the meltin' o' the watch," said Jeames.

"Fat wis that again?" said Macwhirter, although he knew the story well.

"That wis the time o' the terrible het hairst. Peter wis cuttin' ae day, an' got intae sic a faem o' heat 'at his watch meltit in his pooch."

"Did he say that?"

"Ay, he has the watch yet."

"The ane 'at wis meltit?"

"Ay, he said he jeist took 'er oot o's pooch, an' laid 'er doon on a stane, an' she cam' till 'ersel' again."

"Peter coves a'," said Macwhirter.

"He does that. Are ye for a game, Sandy?"

"Na, A doot A hivna time tae pass aff wi' them the day."

"Hoot, nae fears o' ye."

"Ou, weel, A may gi'e ye a game."

Jeames and Sandy spent the next hour in a state of profound absorption. The conversation was meagre, and consisted mainly of a repetition of "Dwine't," "Bather that," "Shift," "Confoon't," "Ay, man." Five games were played, and five times the sarcastic Souter was beaten. At the disastrous finish of the fifth game, Sandy turned, "disgustit wi' them," to his last, and for the rest of the afternoon was company for nobody, least of all for Jeames Nicol. Jeames rose and put the

hand he had been shifting the men with into its appropriate pocket, and went out. It was yet fully half-an-hour from supper-time, so he went and bought an ounce of twist at Merchant Price's. It took him fully half-an-hour to accomplish this, and by the time he reached home the porridge was on the table. He ate his supper with the keen relish and appetite of the man who has duly earned it with the sweat of his brow, and when finished, went to the easy chair in the corner to enjoy his evening smoke.

"Hech! hech!" said he as he dropped into the chair.

Soon afterwards he retired wearily to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

Saturday Night at the Merchant's.

IF you did not live in the Square, you were at a slight disadvantage. It was like, as Macwhirter loved to remark, "bidin' in the shooburbs o' the ceety." Going to Merchant Price's in the dark was a perilous undertaking. When you stepped out of doors, you held up a finger before you to see if you could see it, and if you could not, your safety lay in keeping in touch with the walls of the houses. When you came to a lane, you were lucky if the corner of the house opposite, seeming to step out of the darkness, did not butt you in the face. San'ers Romans, who lived on the roadside about half-a-mile out of Braefoot, was once lost. He had been at Merchant Price's and had bought errands to the amount of threepence half-penny. He had tendered a sixpence in payment and had received his change. He stepped out into the Square in the throes of mental arithmetic. "Thre'pence bawbee fae a saxpence, hoo muckle ower?" he was saying, and so absorbed was he in the calculation that unconsciously he turned up the

town instead of down the town. He walked on and on, wondering why he never came to his house. Finally he got bewildered and strayed into the fields. After tilting at fences for some hours, a streak of light seemed to come to him in the squeak of a young grunter, and he beheld a pigsty. A rustle of straw plainly said "Come in," and he accepted the invitation. He was soon dreamlessly asleep.

Next morning Dykeside's servant lass dropped the pail with the pig's breakfast, rushed into the house with a face the colour of curds, and for some minutes made convulsive and futile efforts to explain herself. San'ers had popped his head out of the sty and asked "Fat time o' day is't."

And little Elsie Lowrie was once lost too. It was a terrible night in Braefoot that. I once found Tollie the bellman a quarter of a mile beyond the furthest house in the up-the-town end of the village crying, "Pork at Jeames Nicol's;" but that was not very much to be wondered at, because frequently Tollie's vision and word were thicker than the darkness. When you got into the Square you would see the window of Merchant Price's shop in front of you. The light of his paraffin lamp became very religious by the time it reached the window. I suppose it did this because it could

see its grave in the darkness a couple of feet beyond. When you went close up to the window you would see that behind its dozen of very small panes it displayed a couple of clay pipes with long stalks, arranged so that, with the co-operation of the top sash-bar they represented a triangle standing on its apex, a sand-glass, a wooden egg-cup, a small bottle of pan-drops, a wire of pipe lids, a trumpet, a spider's "wob" with a living spider and the fragments of a few dead flies, and a tin whistle. Nobody ever looked in at the window except the loons, and they only did so to cry "Ticht wecht." The shop was always in a "steer" on a Saturday night. I remember once waiting for half-an-hour to be served with an ounce of tobacco. It was a dark, starless night. There was a small crowd of customers being served at the counter.

Sandy Macwhirter dropped in about half-past nine o'clock.

"Ay, Merchan'," said Macwhirter.

"Ay," said the merchant.

"Ay, Jeames," continued Macwhirter, turning to Jeames Nicol, who was seated in the corner on a bag of sugar.

"Ay," said Jeames.

"Dark," said Macwhirter.

"Byous," said the merchant.

Then the conversation flagged for a bit.

"Ay," began Macwhirter again.

"Twa unce o' tea an' a pun o' sugar, an' a half a pun o' barley, an' a ha'penny's worth o' split paas, an' a penny can'le, an' a box o' matches, an' a puckly preens, an' twa ha'pennies for a penny," broke in a wee lassie at the counter.

"Twa unce o' tea an' a pun o' sugar—imphm," said the merchant. "That's that. Fat mair wis't, lassiekie?"

"Twa unce o' tea an' a pun o' sugar, an' a half a pun o' barley, an' a ha'penny's worth o' split paas, an'——"

"Bide ye, bide ye—half a pun o' barley an' a ha'penny's worth o' split paas—imphm. That's that. Fat mair wis't, lassiekie, besides the tea, an' the sugar, an' the barley, an' the paas?"

Her lips moved rapidly for a few seconds.

"An' a penny can'le, an' a box o' matches, an'——"

"A penny can'le, an' a box o' matches—imphm. That's that. Fat mair wis't, lassiekie?"

"A—puckly preens an' twa ha'pennies for a penny."

"A wuss ye'd let me awa', Merchan'; A'm in a yawfu' hurry," said a farm servant from the country.

"Weel," said the merchant.

"Let's see taebacca."

"Taebacca—imphm. Fat's daein' up the wy?"

"Little o't. Aye chawvin' awa'."

"Onything mair?"

"Let's see spunks."

"Spunks—imphm. Is that a' noo?"

"That's a'."

"Taebacca thre'pence, spunks a ha'penny—
thre'pence ha'penny. Thank ye."

"Gweednicht, Merchan'."

"Gweednicht lathie. Fat mair did ye say,
lassiekie?"

"A puckly preens an' twa ha'pennies for a
penny."

"Wis't a ha'penny's worth o' preens?"

"No, jeist a puckly tae my mither."

"Preens—imphm. Noo, lassiekie, A think that's
a'. That's—let me see—elevenpence. Ye get
back a penny. Thank ye."

"Weel, lathie, fat wis ye needin'?"

"A pennyworth o' she red herrin', 'cause my
mither likes rawns (roe)."

"Red herrin'—imphm. Noo, than, wis that a'?"

"Ay."

"Hae, here's a sweetie tae ye. Tell yer mither
'at A've gotten in some fine dried cod."

"Weel, leddykie, fat wis ye seekin'?"

"A—A divna min'—boo-hoo."

"Hoot-toot, dinna greet that wy. Rin awa' hame tae yer mammie, an' see fat it wis 'at she sent ye for."

"Weel, mannkie, fat wis't 'at ye wis wantin'?"

"Nichan. A'm in wi' Dite."

"Pun o' seerup," said Dite.

"Seerup—imphm. Gie me yer bowlie?"

The merchant turned on the syrup, a nose flattened itself against the window, the door edged quietly open, and a youthful voice cried, "Ticht wecht." In an instant the merchant was round the counter and in full pursuit of the loons, but before he was half-a-dozen yards from the door they were all "snickering" in Andrew Peat's hen-house.

Macwhirter remarked that it was "won'erfu' hoo loons took notice o' things."

"Ay," said Jeames Nicol.

Remembering that he had left the syrup running, the merchant rushed back into the shop like a gust of wind.

"Dod dwine the ill-contriven nickums," said he, when he saw the overflow of syrup creeping as stealthily as a thief into his till, "jeist look at my gweed seerup."

He grieved over the spilt syrup, which, however, was not so irretrievably lost as spilt milk.

"Onything mair, lathie?"

"No, nichan mair."

"Hae, here's yer seerup, then. That transac' 'll nae pey me sair."

"My mistress sent me back," said a servant lass, "tae say 'at she thinks ye made a mistak' wi' the change."

"Na, lassie, there wis nae mistak'. A'm perfectly setisfeed 'at A gae ye back yer richt change. Ye maun hae lost it."

"She says 'at ye gae me back a saxpence owre muckle."

"Od, it's quite possible, lassie. Thank ye for comin' back wi't. Tell yer mistress 'at A'm muckle obleeged."

"Come awa', leddykie. Div ye min' fat it wis ye wis wantin', noo?"

"Darlin' needles."

"Darnin' needles—imphm. Hae then. Thank ye."

"Weel, mistress, fat wis ye sayin'?"

"A wis wantin' a pun o' yer best cheese."

"Cheese—imphm. A doot A've ta'en aff owre muckle a bit. Wad ye tak' a pennyworth mair. It's richt fine cheese."

"Ou, A'm nae parteeklar till a bittie back or fore. Hiv ye heard gin aul' Burnhead left a wull ahin' 'im, merchan'?"

"A wull—imphm. A'm thinkin' he did."

"He'll hae a gey triffly by 'im?"

"Ay, A'm thinkin' sae. He wis a scrawpin' body, Burnhead."

"Fa's a' bidden tae the beerial?"

"A'm nae thinkin' there's mony o's. Did ye get a bid, Sandy?"

"Na," said Macwhirter (who considered himself overlooked), "A wisna expec'in't. Heaps o' fowk says they've made a clean botch o' the invitations. Bell taul' me 'at Tollie only stoppit at twa doors in the Squar—yer ain' an' the Smith's."

"Noo, mistress, that's yer cheese. Onything mair?"

"Ay, a pennyworth o' extra strongs, an' twa ha'pennies for a penny."

"Extra strongs—imphm. Noo, then, that's tenpence. Thank ye."

By this time it was after ten o'clock, and the shop had gradually cleared. Jeames Nicol, who could really say more than "ay" when he made an effort, rose, laid threepence on the counter, and said—"Taebacca."

"Taebacca — imphm. Hae then, Jeames. Thank ye."

Jeames departed.

"A'll tak' twa ha'pennies fae ye," said Macwhirter.

"Is't yer ain man the morn, Sandy?"

"A'm thinkin' sae. Gweed nicht wi' ye, merchan'."

"Gweednicht, Sandy."

I got my tobacco and soon followed Macwhirter, and as I turned out of the Square I heard the merchant slam to his shop door and bolt it. I groped my way home in the darkness, when in doubt striking matches. When about halfway home, I was arrested by a loud knock at a door on the opposite side of the street.

"Open," said a toper, who was evidently "gey weel tae live."

No response. The lights were out and the door barred.

Another knock.

"Open," hiccuped the same voice.

No response.

"Stand back," said a boon companion.

A louder knock resounded.

"Open, Cæsar."

But still there was no response. I passed on, thinking of Ali Baba and the forty thieves.

CHAPTER V.

The Breaking of Tibbie Nicol's Window.

THERE is nothing on this wide earth that I love like a boy—unless, perhaps, it be a girl. But a boy! When he is only the tiny mewling commencement of a man; when he is “gyan at the hauls” and laughs heartily every time I “stot” a “’lastic ba’” to the ceiling, though I do it until I myself am ten times tired; when he pulls out the damper before going to bed on Christmas eve to facilitate the entrance of the mysterious “Santa;” when he tells me that he has been out in the fields pulling flowers with “long handles;” when he remarks that the holiday children noisily waving their bannerets and handkerchiefs are “flagging” at him; when he explains the river as a “crowd of water;” when he rushes to tell me that the “moon is kindled,” I love him. But it is when he has grown to be a gamesome lad—what the dwellers in Braefoot called a “little nickum” or “mischievous brat”—that he delights me most. Often in my walks I stop to watch him at play. How refreshing it is! His merry laugh sets the bell of the

old school a-jangling, and the curtain lifts on a thousand scenes of my boyhood. When he discovers that "there's a mannie lookin'" he becomes embarrassed and consequently uninteresting, and I pass on, feeling lad enough to vault the first gate that confronts me. It was this, my great affection for the "nickum" species of the genus loon, that once saved Jeckie Macwhirter from what all boys are more or less familiar with, for breaking Tibbie Nicol's window. It was a Saturday night. The rain had "dung on" in terrific "dags" from some time before I had wakened until about 6.30 P.M. The gutters were in flood, but although here and there a nickum might have been seen hard at work at a "daimin'," the bulk of young Braefoot had been indoors flattening its nose against the windows to behold the myriad little fountains that shot up from the streets as the rain pelted heavily down. Now, however, that the rain had ceased they had buzzed out in dozens to play, and I passed a little multitude of them at "chivy" as I crossed the square to Macwhirter's for my Sabbath boots, which he had faithfully promised to have mended for me by seven o'clock that night. Although Sandy had had my boots for a month and I had already called for them several times, always being made

"certant o' them by the en' o' the week," I found that he had not yet commenced them ; so I dug them out from a heap of similar goods in a corner of the shop and placed them on his lap, with the remark that I would stay with him until they were finished. Tammas Lowrie was in the shop. Mac-whirter muttered something about a "hard-up kin' o' a horbe for beets." Then the "crack" began.

"Is't oor ain man 'at we're gyan tae hae the morn ?" queried Sandy.

"Od, A couldna' say," replied Tammas.

"He wis a richt precious man yon'at we had last Sawbath," broke in Bell from the kitchen, which was only separated from the shop by a short passage.

"Ay," said Tammas, "yon birkie gya's fat I wad ca' a —, a —."

"Weel, weel, then!" continued Bell, "he did a' that I assure ye. He didna escape a word, an' he banged it oot richt bonnie. Did ye notice 'at Jeames Nicol didna sleep a wink the hale time o the sermon? and that's nae aul' or'nar wi' Jeames. A wis yawfu' liftit wi' yon man. Meg Macinnes wis yon'er wi' 'er new bonnet on, an' A'm thinkin' she got something tae——"

"A couldna exac'ly say," interrupted Sandy, "'at a folla'd 'im in a' the perteeklars."

"Weel, no," said Tammas, "There wis times, man, 'at he gaed yawfu' deep."

"Nae 'at he gaed owre deep for me," said Sandy, "but A couldna exac'ly say ae wy wi' 'im a'thegither in some o's views. Yon prayer 'at he begood wi' about the rain kin' o' did for the mannie wi' me. It's my opeenion 'at it's nae eese tae pray for rain."

"The rain cam' tho'," said Tammas.

"'Twad 'av come onywy," continued Sandy. "I minteen if its gyan tae be rain it'll be rain fither or no, an' if its gyan tae be drocht it'll be drocht. Far's the eese or sense in prayin' tae the Creator tae interfere wi' the laws 'at he himsel' made tae rule the universe? Ye see the warl's wun' up like a clock tae gyang tae the hin'eren' o' time. There's a reg'lator 'at answers tae certain condeetions an' reg'lates the weather. If the condeetions for rain are there then we'll get it; if no then we maun jeist pit up wi' the drocht. The rain'll come—it's boun' tae come—jeist like the meen fan the condeetions admit o't. The Creator doesna interfere. That's my opeenion."

"Weel, ay, there's a hantle in that, Sandy," said Tammas; but ye're forgettin' 'at Elias wis a man subjec' tae like passions sic as we are, an' he prayed earnestly——"

"A dinna," interrupted Sandy, "A dinna gie mysel' oot as thorowly oon'erstan'in' ilka thing 'at the Almichty's deen, an' A'm nae sayin' bit fat at the first vizey o't that looks like an argyment, Tammas. But haud a meenit. That was a case b' itsel'. The Israeleets had gane wud aboot their eedol Baal, an' the Almichty——"

At that moment the kitchen door was violently burst open, and Jackie shot ben the passage like a hunted rabbit and hid himself in the closet. Tibbie Nicol was the next to appear on the scene.

"Heh!" snorted Tibbie, who was much excited, "yon's a fine antic 'at yer loon's played up this nicht, Mistress Macwhirter."

"Fat noo, Tibbie?" said Bell.

"Fat noo?" shrieked Tibbie, "the little ill-contriven deevil's broken my winda an' spil't a geranium 'at there wisna the marrows o' in the toon. That's fat noo! Ye've nae business, Mistress Macwhirter, tae alloo yer bairns tae bide oot owre the door a single meenit efter it's dark. That loon o' yours an' a curn mair o' them hiv been haudin' a fine time o't this whilie back; bit A'm determined 'at A'll gar the p'leece pit a stop till't. It's hard 'at the likes o' me ——"

By this time Macwhirter had taken Jackie prisoner, and escorted him into the kitchen.

"'Twasna' me," said Jackie, sobbing like to break his young heart.

"'Twas you, ye leein' soon'rel," said Tibbie, "Mistress Lowrie saw ye."

"'Twasna' me," repeated Jackie.

Macwhirter had laid Jackie, face downwards, across his knee, and hastily began some preliminary undoings, while Jackie yelled as only a boy under such circumstances can. It was only a stride or two from the shop to the kitchen, and in an instant I was there interceding for Jackie. I succeeded in getting his punishment postponed until it was certain that it was really he who had broken Tibbie's window.

"Mistress Nicol," said Macwhirter, "A'll see 'at that winda's made a' richt the first thing on Monday mornin'."

Tibbie, who had had her hand on the sneck of the door for the last few minutes, said, "Heh!" and departed.

"Pit the loon till's bed," said Sandy to Bell.

When we returned to the shop we found that Tammas Lowrie had gone, and Sandy, remarking that she was a "bairgin' eediot o' a wife yon" settled down to the mending of my boots in earnest and in silence. In a few minutes Jackie scrambled up to his bed in the garret, Bell close

behind him, and I overheard the following dialogue :—

Bell—" Say yer good words."

Jeckie—" Father chart in heaven, hollered be Thy name ; Thy kingdom come ; give us each day —— "

Bell—" Thy will be don."

Jeckie—" A said that."

Bell—" Nae impidence tae yer mither noo. Min' A'll hae nane o't."

Jeckie—" Weel 'an A did say't."

Bell—" Peety me wi' ye. ' Thy will be don.' "

Jeckie—" Thy will be done in heaven as it is on earth ; give us each day our—— "

(Boom, boom, boom, sounded from the Square. The band was in the habit of perambulating the streets every Saturday night).

Jeckie—" 'Od a-michty, the band ! A'm gyan tae rise."

Bell—" Lie doon there, ye—— "

My ears being now flooded with the booming of the big drum and the strains of " The Minstrel Boy," I heard nothing more of this dialogue until the band had passed over the bridge and the music had died away in the distance. Then :—

Bell—" For what end wis ye made ? "

Jeckie—" Tae serve God."

Bell—"What way should ye serve God?"

Jeckie—"By 'beying His commands, reading——"

Bell—"By obeying His commands and trusting in Him."

Jeckie—"And trusting in Him, reading, hearing, prayer an' praise."

Bell—"Noo, Johnnie, tell me the truth. Min' God's hearin' ye. Was't you 'at broke Tibbie Nicol's winda?"

Jeckie—"No 'twasna."

Bell—"Fa was't then?"

Jeckie—"A divna ken. 'Twasna me onywy."

Bell—"Is yer back richt stappit?"

If Jeckie made answer I did not hear him. By and by the band returned, but by this time Jeckie was fast asleep, and not even the stalwart drummer's booming accompaniment to "Gin I were where the Gaudie runs" could rouse him from his restful slumbers.

When Macwhirter went to Tammas Lowrie's on Monday morning to commission him to mend the broken window he found that Tammas had already done so. The facts were these. Jeckie with his hands in his waistcoat pockets, and swaying off one foot on to the other, had been in front of Tibbie's window singing—

Traycle in a bowlie,
Seerup in a cup,
Hey, Tibbie Nicol,
Is yer rhubarb up?

Wangie Lowrie, who with some others watched the "fun" from a "slappie" on the other side of the street, threw a stone, which luckily missed Jackie and unluckily crashed through the window. Jackie was seen running away from the spot at the top of his speed by Mistress Lowrie, who apprised Tibbie of the circumstance, exacting a promise from her that she "wadna pit her name till't." A few days afterwards Jackie Macwhirter asked me if I wanted any "rosit en's" to "wup" my fishing-wand, and I was puzzled to know the reason why until I bethought me that one good turn deserves another.

CHAPTER VI.

The Troubles of Betty Shanks.

IT was about half-past seven o'clock, and it was pitch dark.

"Ay, Tommie, lad, far hae ye been the nicht?" said Betty Shanks, as she sat with her elbows on her knees building up a small peat fire on the hearth with the tongs, "min' this is nae tae be a wy o' workin'. There's you been oot ever sin' sax o'clock this nicht, an' it's only aenoo 'at ye think it fit tae pit in an appearance again. This is bonnie conduc', is'nt it? Far in the worl' o' Gweed hiv ye been? An' sic a mess wi' gutters tae. Fechtin', I'se warrant. My certes, lad, ye'll hae tae turn owre a new leaf, an' that smairtly tae. Wis ye nae a hungert wagrant fan I took ye in aff the street, an' hiv ye nae been comfortable an' weel deen tae sin' syne. An' for a' that this is hoo ye conduc' yersel'. Oot nicht efter nicht, leavin' me here a' by mysel' withoot a single cratur tae speak tae or tae open my min' till. A'm sure gin I'd noticed I nottna been at this wi't; but that nicht—weel div I min't—A wis that mad at Jock

for reesin' oot Bell M'Whapple an' her new goon sae muckle 'at A fairly lost my temper wi' 'im, an' tell't 'im tae gyang an' pit Bell M'Whapple an' her new goon up his back for a hump. Ay, Tommie, an't hadna been for that I dootna but I wad 'ave been Mistress John Tolmie this nicht. He'd niver seen me wi' my back up afore that, an' I assure ye he gaed awa' lookin' gey disappintit like. I aye thocht he wad come back, an' waitit an' waitit, but —— " Crash !

There was a loud noise of breaking glass at the window. Tommie, who was the cat, ran in below the bed. Betty, who was a miserly old maid and the loons' pet aversion because of the fruit trees in her garden which she would not allow them to rifle, threw up her arms and exclaimed—

" God preserve a' mortal ! "

Over in the baker's " slappie " Wangie Lowrie, Jackie Macwhirter, and a half-score similar urchins, who had smashed a couple of glass bottles beneath Betty's window, were snickeringly awaiting the upshot.

Betty quickly appeared at the door, crying, " Fa's broken my winda ? "

" Keep in, lads," said Wangie Lowrie.

" Fa's broken my winda ? " continued Betty, approaching it.

Tibbie Nicol, Betty's next-door neighbour, hearing the noise, also appeared on the scene.

"Gweed be aboot me, Betty, fat's vrang?" said Tibbie.

"Some ane's broken my winda," wailed Betty.

"Eh! isn't that most meschievious," said Tibbie.

There was no light in Betty's house but such as was given forth by the peat fire. She never afforded any other.

"A canna mak' oot far it's broken," said Tibbie, running her hand over the panes; "gyang intae the hoose for a can'le, Betty."

Betty went into the house and reappeared with a candle which had been a whole one three months previously, and which, at Betty's rate of burning, was yet good for other three months at least. It was stuck into a black bottle adorned with streaks of white grease, and she sheltered its white flame from the weather with a huge milk plate.

"Deil a bit o' the winda's broken," said Tibbie.

"Fat in the worl' o' Gweed cud it 'ave been then?" said Betty.

"Jeist look at that," said Tibbie, pointing to her feet, "the boddams o' twa broken bottles! It's been the loons. Isn't—~~that~~—most—michty?"

"He! he! he!" laughed one of the loons from the baker's "slappie."

"Go, ye impident scoonrels," shouted Tibbie, stamping her foot. "I see ye fine (they were all round a corner); I ken ilka ane o' ye. A'll go het fit this very meenit for the p'leece, an' get the whole apothic o' ye pitten intae the lock-up. Tae go and molest a decent wumman 'at wisna hairmin' ye! 'Twis enough tae fleg 'er oot o' 'er joodgment."

"Traycle in a bowlie," cried Jackie Macwhirter.

Here Tibbie made a rush for the "slappie" and the loons for the goods shed. Tibbie did not follow up the chase, but returned when she had reached the other side of the street. Betty gathered together the larger bits of the broken bottles and threw them into the "cat's hole" between her own and Tibbie's tenement.

"Eh me, Tibbie," said Betty, "my heart's fleggit oot o' it's richt place."

"Puir thing," replied Tibbie, "ye'll better gyang intae the hoose an' sit doon for a meenit till ye come tae yersel'."

While Betty was sitting by her peat fire waiting till her heart would resume its natural position, the loons, as Sandy Macwhirter once remarked, were "about their father's business." Betty kept a cow

and sold milk. Her byre was situated at the foot of her garden, and the loons were aware that she always did her milking in the dark.

"Come on," said Wangie Lowrie, as they were all standing at the back of the goods shed, and all trying to speak at once, "come on an' tak' Betty's coo oot o' the byre an' pit in the Pinner's assie."

"Michty, ay," said Jackie Macwhirter.

So away they went, and Betty's cow was cautiously led from the byre and the Pinner's donkey installed in her stead. The loons took up their station behind Betty's peat stack awaiting events. By and by Betty arrived with her cog, opened the byre door, and went in to milk her cow.

"Stan' about, humlie," said Betty, feeling in vain for the cow. "In the worl' o' Gweed faur are ye?"

The loons were cramming their bonnets into their mouths.

Taking a step forward and touching the donkey's side with her cog, Betty sat down and began to feel for the cow's udder.

"Haud up wi' ye," said she, "ye're stan'in' unco laich the nicht. In the worl' o' Gweed fat's come o' yer ether?"

The Pinner's donkey, unaccustomed to such handling, vigorously protested against it by kicking Betty's cog outside the door.

"Quate wi' ye," screamed Betty, hurriedly retreating after the cog.

"Crickey," snickered Wangie Lowrie under his breath, "yon's the cogie."

"Betty stood speechless for a minute at the byre door. Then—

"Surely the coo maun be witched the nicht," she said to herself. "I hinna kent 'er lift a fit tae me sin' A bocht 'er. An' A wis niver but fat A could lay my hands on 'er ether. A maun gyang tae the hoose for the can'le."

While Betty was away for the candle to shed light on the mystery, the loons set the Pinner's donkey at liberty, put Betty's cow back into the byre, and took up their old position behind the peat stack. Betty returned, and kindling her candle in the byre, beheld her cow standing very quietly, but looking somewhat bewildered like at the sight of the candle light.

"No," said she, holding up the candle and examining "humlie," "A see naething oot o' the ord'nar. Her ether's there richt eneugh. Fat's possessed ye the nicht, ye limmer? Tak' that, an' that, an' that" (snatching up a scraper and belabouring the innocent cow).

The hearty laughter of the loons would now

have been heard but for the noise made by the cow cringing up into a corner of the stall.

"Stan' about noo," said Betty.

The cow stood round in fear and trembling, and Betty milked her. That done she returned to the house, where a number of boys and girls were waiting to get their milk, some a ha'pennyworth, and some a pennyworth. Having served her customers, she blew out the candle and set herself down in front of the peat fire.

"That fowk o' Lowries are lang in sen'in' for their milk the nicht, Tommie," said she.

"Meow-ow," replied Tommie, who had just enjoyed a saucerful of milk, and was stretched at full length, quietly appreciating the warmth of the fire. At this moment the sneck of the door lifted and in stepped Wangie Lowrie, looking the incarnation of innocence, and turning an expectant eye in the direction of Betty's hearth. Before he had come in he had tied a stone to the end of a cord, and Jackie Macwhirter, who had climbed on to the roof of Betty's house, was to let it down through the chimney.

"Gie me yer pailie," said Betty,

Wangie did so, and edged himself nearer the fire.

"Wis ye oot playin' yersel' the nicht, loonie?" asked Betty.

"No," replied Wangie.

"There wis some loons makin' a din at my winda the nicht," said Betty. "I wish I kent fa it wis. I'd pit the p'leece till them."

"I wisna fit-ony-rate," said Wangie.

By this time the stone with the cord attached was lying on the "bink."

"Weel, waity till I gyang up tae the garret," said Betty, "an' A'll gi'e you a hirie, 'cause ye're a gweed laddie, an' wisna amon' that weggybons o' loons 'at nearly fleggit me oot o' my wut."

While Betty was rumbling in the garret for a "hirie," Wangie took the cord and tied it firmly round Tommie's neck, and placed a large stool over him to conceal him, and set himself down thereon. Tommie began to play with the cord, all unconscious of the aerial experience which awaited him. When Wangie heard Betty coming downstairs, he took his "pailie" and went to meet her.

"Hae here's a aipple tae ye 'cause ye're a gweed laddie," said Betty.

Wangie took the apple and went out. Jeckie Macwhirter and the rest of the accomplices were standing at the gable of the house holding the cord to which Tommie had been secured, and waiting impatiently for the word to pull. Wangie crept quietly to the window to peep in and watch

for a favourable opportunity. Betty had scarcely set herself down by the fire again when Wangie cried out under his breath, "Pull, lads, pull."

Bang went the stool into the middle of the floor, and up the chimney went Tommie, caterwauling and struggling for dear life. Betty shrieked and fled into Tibbie Nicol's. The loons hid at the back of the house.

"The Lord hae mercy on me, Tibbie!" said Betty, as she fell into a chair, and covered her face with her apron, "there's something far, far vrang in my hoose this nicht."

"Fat noo, Betty?"

"O'oman A cudna tell ye," said Betty, swinging backwards and forwards, "there's something far, far vrang. First o' a' fan A gaed doon tae milk humlie, A got a dreedfu' fricht. The coo wis fairly witched. A cudna lay my han's on 'er ether, 'oman, tho' A sud niver deen mair. It wis clean awa', Tibbie."

"The coo's ether awa'!" exclaimed Tibbie.

"Ay, tho' A sud be ta'en afore the Almichty this meenit, Tibbie, the coo's ether wis awa'. A thocht fan A gaed back wi' the can'le an' saw't there a' richt eneugh again 'at A micht 'ave been mista'en. But A cudna been mista'en. A'm sure eneuch o't noo. An' syne, jeist aenoo, fan A wis sittin' at the

fireside thinkin' aboot it, the cat gaed fair mad, 'oman, an' jumpit clean oot at the lum."

"Na, Betty, ye're surely wan'erin'," said Tibbie.

"There's something far, far vrang," said Betty.

"Come awa' back tae the hoose till we see," said Tibbie.

By this time the loons had released Tommie and had wisely disappeared.

Tibbie and Betty went back to the house, and while Tibbie was lifting the stool from the middle of the floor in rushed Tommie, originally for the most part white, looking as black as Erebus. In a second he was the only occupant of the house.

Fear as well as fire "mak's auld fowk nim'le."

That night Jeames Nicol locked Betty's door on the outside, and Tibbie shared her bed with Betty.

During the night, and without troubling to awake, Betty maintained that there was something "far, far vrang." Tibbie woke several times and wondered why. In the morning she gave Betty a vigorous poke in the ribs, and said, "Jeames, man, disturb yersel' tae pit a spunk tae the can'le."

CHAPTER VII.

Fairies.

AWAY up the kirk burn from Braefoot, amongst the heather on the hills there, you will find the weather-wasted ruins of dwelling-houses. A little space about each of them—there are only a few of them to be seen now—is still green, and there the silly sheep find a partial shelter from the stormy blasts. These “rickles” of storm-bleached stones are all that remain of the homes of upwards of fifty families who once peopled that part of the parish known as the Burn of Braefoot. I doubt not the descendants of those families would be living there now but for the following facts. Owing to the depression which followed in the wake of the battle of Waterloo, the Burn Crofters found themselves unable to scrape together the rents they had hitherto paid. Naturally anxious to retain their crofts, they went to the laird in a body, offering him fair and possible rents, but alas! the laird had a better offer. A gentleman farmer of means and influence, fancying the place for a

sheep farm, had outbidden the crofters, and they had to give up their little holdings, reluctantly enough, and go in quest of the means of existence elsewhere. But whither should they go? That was the only burning question that was ever known to have agitated the little community. They have all ceased from troubling long ago. For many years both they and the gentleman farmer have occupied that last little holding which somewhere or other is allotted to all mankind. Where they sowed and reaped corn the heather blooms abundantly to-day, and the crack of the whip has long given place to that of the sportsman's gun. You will hear, as you wander there now, the bark of the shepherd's dog, and the bleat of the mountain sheep, and the "birrbeck, birrbeck" of the moorfowl, but you will listen in vain for the merry laughter and the joyous shouts of the crofters' children, and you will look in vain for the little mill which, as it ground the flail-threshed corn into meal, mingled its homely music with that of the prattling peat-coloured burn. They were a kind, neighbourly people who lived in the Burn. They had only about a score of ploughs amongst them; but to a community like them, ready and willing to help each other, the number was more than adequate. One loon was herd to a considerable number, who

paid him out of a common purse and fed and lodged him by turns. They were an austere people too. It is told of one of them that on seeing his son carelessly allowing some cattle to stray into a field of corn, he hastily snatched up a "rung," and, breaking into a double, made for the erring youth to belabour him. The boy, taking in the situation, took to flight; but his father, longer in the legs and in the wind, was quickly within a few strides of him. The boy halted. "Father, father, hae mercy on me," he cried; but the affectionate father, mindful of his duty to his son, would not spare the rod, and sternly answered, "A'm d——d if A wull, Geordie."

And they smuggled whisky up there, too, in spite of the preventive men. Often the "ewie wi' the crookit horn" was the most remunerative animal on the croft. One of the houses commanded a full view of the approach to the Burn, and whenever a stranger was sighted, a signal of warning was run up to the chimney-top. They were also superstitious. Many of them had a rooted belief in the existence of fairies. Near by where those houses stood there rises into view from the deep channel of the burn a little green hill shaped like a pyramid, called the Dounie. It was on the summit of this brocken that the fairies,

green-kilted and red-headed, were believed, and under favourable conditions seen, to hold carnival.

All this was vividly recalled to my mind as I trudged along in the moonlight in response to the message—"Eppie Douglas sent me doon tae tell ye 'at she wis wantin' tae speak tae ye ; an' tae see if ye'd be as good's come up the nicht." Eppie Douglas was a cheery old body whose forebears had been crofters in the Burn. She had one favourite topic—fairies. When I arrived at her house the front door was open, and I could hear the lively octogenarian crooning to herself one of her "aul' ballants." She sang in a trembling, gossamer thread of a voice—

"She turned from the Squire, an' nothing she said ;
Instead of being mairit, she went to her bed :
The thocht o' the fairmer still ran in her mind,
And a way for to gain him this lady did find.

"Waistcoat and breeches this lady put on,
A-hunting she went with her dog an' her gun,
And hunted all round where the fairmer did dwell,
Because in her heart she loved him well."

I knocked at the inner door, and then opened it.

"Come awa', come awa' ben, my young gentleman," said Eppie ; "it wis rale muckle o' ye. A wis wantin' ye tae tak' a vizy o' my knockie here. It stoppit in the mids o' the day, an' A couldna get it tae the road again tho' A sud niver deen

mair. A canna be wantin' my knockie, ye ken, by onything again. It's jeist like a breath in the hoose tae me."

I diagnosed Eppie's "wag-at-the-wa," and found that it only needed to be wound up, so I gave it a turn or two and set it "tae the road."

"An' muckle thanks tae ye," said Eppie, when she heard its complacent tick; "the hoose has been dreedfu' lanesome kin' sin' denner time for the want o't."

Eppie's "wag-at-the-wa'" was an heirloom, and she never spoke of it without reverting to her forebears. The transition from them to the fairies was an easy one, and as certain to follow as the night the day.

"Sit doon there, my young gentleman," she began; "A maun tell ye this. That's my grannie's knockie, ye ken. Weel, sir, that wis the knockie 'at she wis aye risin' fae the fire an' lookin' at—losh, that's nae yesterday—thinkin' yawfu' lang 'at her goodman—aul' Whinnies, ye ken—wad come hame the nicht 'at he got 'imsel' elfin-shot. Ha, ha, ha! A'll never forget it, young gentleman. He wis doon in the toon o' Braefit here, ye ken, an' a fyow mair o' them fae the Burn, an' they'd letten't geylys owre—'twis a Setterday's nicht, ye see—afore iver they'd jowed tae mak' for hame.

Notice, noo, this is fat A'm gyan tae tell ye, sir. Aul' Whinnies had a bottle o' barm in's oxter pooch takin' hame wi' 'im. Ye ken fat that wis for, sir. Losh, gentleman, there wis nae want o' the drappie at that time o' day. Ye'd hae gotten as muckle o't for tuppence as wad hae gart ye need the hale breid o' the road. Weel, sir, as they were gyan by the Dounie—'twis dark an' mark by this time—they heard something gi'e a yawfu' shot, an' aul' Whinnies—ha, ha, ha! gentleman—he pat's han' intae's oxter, ye ken, an' fan't a' weet, sir, an' thinkin' it wis bleed cried oot 'at he wis elfin-shot. Weel, sir, they a' begood tae run for hame, an A aye min' fat aul' Whinnies said tae the lave—'A may run a whilie, lads,' said he, 'but it canna be vera lang.' Hooiver, they a' managed tae mak hame, but fan aul' Whinnies took the bottle o' barm oot o's pooch, fint a cork wis in the bottle, an' there wisna as muckle barm in't's wad hae covered the boddam o' that platie there."

"So it was the bottle of barm that gave the shot," said I—my stock remark to Eppie every time that she told me this story.

"Fat ither, young gentleman? Ha, ha, ha!"

Eppie's stories were not new to me, and desirous of getting home early, I rose at this point to bid her good-night.

"Sit still there, sit still, my young gentleman" (pushing me back into my seat); "A maun tell ye this ane. This is a true story, tae, ye ken. Greenbanks, ye ken. Weel, sir, he wis oot at a lykewauk ae nicht—losh, that's nae yesterday—an' afore he gaed awa' he tell't his goodwife tae gyang till her bed an' nae tae sit up waitin' for him. So aboot nine o'clock she took the bar aff the door, nae tae haud her risin' again, an' gaed awa till her bed. Weel, sir, she wis lyin' waukrife in her bed, an' a' at ance she heard the door flee open, but tho' she harkit an' harkit, she niver heard ony body come intae the hoose. So, thinkin' 'twas the win' 'at had blawn up the door, she rose oot o' 'er bed tae shut it, but fan she gaed till't the door wis fest on the sneck—jeist the vera wy 'at she'd left it. Weel, sir, she wis some fley'd at this, an' gaed awa' back till 'er bed again, an' beerit hersel' owre the head amon' the blankets. Notice, noo, this is fat A'm gyan tae tell ye, sir. Fan Greenbanks cam' hame—'twas a' fir lights that time o' day, ye ken—fan Greenbanks cam' hame, an' wis graipin' an' glampin' amon' the peats in the neuk for a fir licht, fat think ye did he get, my young gentleman? Ha, ha, ha! Weel, sir, he got haud o' a creatur nane bigger than a new-born littlin, an' he speert at it fat wy it cam' tae be

there, but a' 'at it said wis, 'The door wis open an' I cam' in.' Weel, sir, he gya't milk an' bread an' it took the milk an' bread, but aye fan he speert ony thing at it a' 'at it wad say, wis, 'The door wis open an' I cam' in.' But fan the creatur wis gyan awa' again it said 'at him nor his wad niver want meal nor milk. An' nayther they did. Noo, that's a true story. Some o' the neebors saw the creatur clim'in aboot the Dounie the neist mornin'. Losh, that's nae yesterday."

Here I made another attempt to get away.

"Bide ye noo, bide ye noo, my young gentleman; A maun tell ye anither story. Aul' Burnhead, ye ken. He ance got a weird tae, sir, 'at he wis niver tae want meal. Weel, sir, he wis oot ploo'in' ae day—losh, that's nae yesterday—an' a fairy cam' till 'im, an' it said, 'If ye'll gi'e me a spurkle, A'll gi'e you porritch an' milk.' Losh, gentleman, A niver forgot this story. Weel, sir, he took the pin aff the ploo, an' gya't tae the fairy, an' sal, gentleman, it wis as good's its word, an' it gya him porritch an' milk, an' he suppit the porritch an' milk. Notice, noo, this is fat A'm gyan tae tell ye, sir. The loon 'at wis alang wi' 'im—ca'in' the owsen wi' the gaud, ye ken—he got some o' the porritch an' milk tae, sir, but he wadna sae muckle's pit a speen amon' them, an' he wis

gotten a corp in's bed neist mornin'. Noo, that's a true enough story, sir. It wis han't doon fae aul' Burnhead 'imself an' he wis as gweed-a-fearin' (God-fearing) man as iver stan't ahin a ploo."

"Ha, ha, ha! young gentleman," continued Eppie, before I could move, "there wis plenty o' fairies in aul' times. They wad 'ave come intae yer hoose, sir, an' ta'en the vera littlin oot o' the cradle, an' left ane o' their ain creaturs in'ts place. The aul' fowk, ye ken, wad 'ave hauden a girnin', discontentit littlin owre the fire, an' if it had been a changed creatur, it wad 'ave gane oot at the lum like a flichter."

I was now secretly congratulating myself, thinking that this was the conclusion, but alas!

"Toots, sit doon, my young gentleman; sit doon there. A maun tell ye a richt ane, ye ken, afore ye gyang. This is ane worth yer pains. Broonie-clod, ye ken. Weel, sir, ae nicht—losh that's nae yesterday——"

Here there was a whispering at Eppie's window, and immediately the voice of a young friend rang out—

"The craw kill't the pussie, O,
The craw kill't the pussie, O,
The muckle cat sat doon an' grat
At the back o' Eppie's hoosie, O."

"Here that weggybons o' loons," said Eppie.

On the pretence of apprehending the "weggybons o' loons," I at last managed to get away. When I got to the street not a soul was to be seen. I trudged home in the moonlight, charitably disposed towards Jackie Macwhirter, and musing on the decline and disappearance of the ancient elfin peoples.

CHAPTER VIII.

At the Souter's.

ABOUT the time that the last train puffed hurriedly round the incline away from Braefoot, leaving a trailing white cloud for a minute behind it, the women folk of that quiet little village were generally washing their dishes after supper. The men—in the summer time—had kindled their pipes, and gone—some to the “yaird” to “howe” the kail or such like “orra jots,” and others, to the bridge in the centre of the village to “see fat wis daein’.” The boys had gone to the back streets to “rowe” their girds, or to the market green to play at the bat, and the little girls were growing roses on their cheeks at the skip-rope, or perhaps they were playing at “ease.” Pretty often about this time, too, a coterie of us met at Macwhirter’s shop, where draughts were played and matters of public moment enlarged upon and debated. Sometimes I have seen us have a hand at the “cairts” too. One evening, as I lifted the sneck of Sandy’s shop door, I heard him exclaim, rather angrily, “Touch a man, shift ’im.” He was playing at

draughts, and had not had the best of the previous game. About half-a-dozen, including Dauvit Guthrie, the roadman, who was known to be a "great Macwhirter man," and Tammas Winter, the gravedigger, were doubling themselves over the souter and Jeames Nicol, eagerly watching the progress of the duel.

"O ay, of coorse, 'Touch a man, shift 'im,' that's the rules," said Dauvit. Jeames, in his lazy way, made no remark. He was going over the shifts with his chin. After a while he shifted the man he had unwittingly touched. This gave Sandy a slight advantage, but Jeames had the "posection," as you could easily gather from the confident way in which he kept his "cutty" going.

"Noo, souter," said Dauvit, "ye've the ba' at yer fit gin ye play yer cairts richt."

Somebody said "Imphm," but it was done in a way that committed the speaker to nothing further than a thorough grasp of the situation.

"Ay, A like yer posection, Sandy," said another.

"Poof! it's a win! Nae twa wys aboot it," argued Dauvit.

"Let's see noo," said Sandy. Then he shifted. Jeames smoked.

"Noo Jeames," and the souter rubbed his hands,

and his eyes twinkled, and his mouth twitched as he looked round the eager assembly.

Jeames smoked.

"O, that saddles't," said Dauvit. "A tell't ye 'twas a win for the souter."

Jeames shifted. He threw two men and took three, landing very deliberately in the crownhead.

"Croon 'im," said he, and his pipe nearly dropped from his mouth.

"Con—foon't!" exclaimed Sandy.

"A wis sure o't," said the man who had previously remarked "Imphm."

"Dyod, lads, that shift coves a'," said the gravedigger.

A few more shifts and Jeames had scored another win. Sandy turned to his cobbling with the remark that "he wisna in the richt meed for't."

Jeames returned the hand he had been shifting with to its appropriate pocket.

"The game wis yours, Sandy," said Dauvit, if ye'd played it richt fae the beginnin'."

"A don' know, man," replied somebody.

"Nae twa wys about it," continued Dauvit; "he gya Jeames a swite for't as 'twas. Fat pleases me wi' the souter's play, lads, is the wy 'at he shifts withoot ever thinkin' about it. He's byous knackie

at the shifts. Jeames, again, he tak's a' his tae avisnawdum (avizandum). He—"

"Ay, an' aul' Hendry's worn awa' doon amon' ye," interrupted Sandy, starting a more congenial topic.

"Ay, ay, he's gone," said the gravedigger, who was consequently disposed to be cheerful.

He was a sour tempered character the gravedigger, given to much complaining of the "slack times" when there was "naething daein' in the yaird." But he brightened up wonderfully at the news of a death. That sad, forlorn look which possesses the face of those who have just lost some loved one—that look which makes us grip them warmly by the hand and say little, was sweeter than the sweetest smile to Tammas Winter.

"Fan are they layin' 'im doon?" said Sandy.

"Wedsinday," said the gravedigger.

"Ay, weel, puir chiel," said Sandy, "nae tae say nae ill on the dead, Hendry nott it a'."

"Ay he was a roch cabar," said Dauvit, "fond o' the dram, especially in the first o' 's day. His first wife had her ain adae wi' 'im I can tell ye. Mony a lang wait did she wait for Hendry tae come hame fae 's work. Ay, she wis sadlys pitten till wi' 'im sometimes, an' ye wadna wussed tae spoken wi' a' quater, genteeler 'oman than Betty. A min'

ance, lads, 'at she wis jeist fair forced tae come tae the public for 'im. He'd been on the batter that time for the feck o' a fortnicht. Him an' me wis sittin' in the Harra at a gless fan Betty opened the front door an' pat her head in—she wadna pit a fit in ower't—an' speert ben if he'd hae time tae come hame tae 's yesterday's breakwast."

"Fat said Hendry?" queried Sandy.

"Ou, Hendry wis awa' fae spikin', but I cried butt 'at he'd be in a meenit."

"A gaed hame wi' 'im that time," continued Dauvit, "an' A saw 'at Betty wis yawfu' pitten about an' brokendoon-like, but she never said a wrang word till's, an' gi'e 'im 's due, Hendry niver focht wi' Betty, tho' A've heard him an' her 'at's his weeda noo throwin' epitaphs (epithets) at ane anither."

"Ay," said someone, "Betty thole't a heap."

"Bit, Hendry, if he'd deen the richt gate," said Sandy, "sud 'ave mairit Leezbeth o' the Brae at the time he took Betty."

"Ay, Ay?"

"Ay," continued Sandy, "they were within an ace o' bein' cried fan Hendry drew back. He didna dae richt wi' Leezbeth. Oor Bell had it a' fae 'ersel' mony a year efter. They had nae fecht. He jeist saw Betty an' thocht 'at she wad shuit

'im better. So he sent a letter tae Leezbeth, an' trystit wi' 'er tae meet 'im in the Den. Leezbeth met 'im in the Den, an' Hendry, he says, 'Leezbeth, you an' me maun pairt.' 'Is't for aenoo or for aye?' said Leezbeth. 'For aye,' said Hendry; an' that wis a' 'at passed. Leezbeth turned 'ersel about an' gaed aff hame het fit, an' niver wear't anither look upon 'im efter't."

"Weemin's queer creaturs," said Jeames Nicol.

"That wisna richt o' Hendry," said Dauvit.

"A'm thinkin'," said Sandy, "he'll hae left the weeda gey bare."

"A some doot it," said Dauvit.

"But the son's in a wy o' weel-daein'," said some one.

"A see the son hame fae Lon'on," said Sandy.
"He's a buck for ye."

"Ay, weel, weel," said the gravedigger, "he wis up at me the day about the grun; but 'in A hadna kent a' the oots an' ins o't mysel', A'd a come heely tae, for fint a bit o' me cud mak' tap, tail, or mane o' fat the chielie said. He's a heap waurer tae mak' oot than the minister on Sawbath."

"The ablach tried it on wi' me," said Sandy,
"but I seen pat a stop till't."

"Ye cudna pick 'im up either, cud ye, Sandy?" said Jeames.

"Hoot, aye cud A, Jeames," replied Sandy;
"A'm nae jeist wholloly a feel."

The gravedigger picked up a "birse," and suddenly busied himself redding his pipe.

"Fat wy," asked one of the company, "did ye shut 'im up, Sandy?"

"Ou," said Sandy, "fan he'd gotten on wi's gibberish for a whilie, says I, cud ye tell me wis Baalawm's ass fup-tail't or dockit?"

"Man! man!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Fat said he till that?"

"Ou, he took me up in the meenit. 'A see ye're aye the aul' lad, Macwhirter,' said he."

"Ay, as ye say, Hendry nott it a'," said Dauvit, who felt that the conversation had run down a siding.

"Hiv ye Jeames Nicol wi' ye?" came from the shop door.

"Ay."

"Tibbie's wantin' im."

"Gweed-nicht wi' ye a'," said Jeames.

"Gweed-nicht, Jeames," said all, with the exception of Sandy.

Having now got a beginning, the meeting rapidly "scaled." In a few minutes it had dwindled down to Sandy and Dauvit. I stood for a

minute or two outside the shop door, filling my pipe, and as I did so, I heard Sandy remark—

“Jeames is mighty prood o’s twa gamies; but gin I’d been in the richt meed for’t—”

“Nae twa wys about it,” said Dauvit.

I crossed the dusky Square, and on my way homeward my ear caught the rush of the Swift. I turned my steps towards it. It was a warm night, and as I sauntered down the burn, the rats went “plop” off the banks into the water. Away in the woods, on the steep hillsides, I could hear the distant and loud “tuwhoo” of the owls. It was an eerie sound, and there was a mutual start when, on my approaching the river, a family of wild ducks went “quack! quack! quack!” away into the fast gathering night.

When I came back, Braefoot was shrouded in darkness, save for a light in Henry’s window. I turned into the house, lit my lamp, and, picking up Shakespeare, my eyes fell on the following—

“The evil that men do live after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.”

I sat and bethought me of Hendry’s good qualities, and was surprised at their considerable number.

CHAPTER IX.

Expelled.

JEAMIE GORDON was round at the back of the house glowering dreamily into his rabbit-box, where "Daisy," his "map," was merry at an ample breakfast of newly-plucked dandelions.

"Jeamikie ! Jeamikie ! Jeamikie !"

"Ay, ay, A'll be aenoo."

"Come awa', then ; fat are ye sneeterin' there at ?"

"Ay, ay ;" (in undertones) "haud yer lang weesht, A'm comin'."

Mammie Gordon, Jeamie's grandmother, stood waiting him at the front door.

"Heest ye, then. See, A'm needin' ye tae rin an erran'."

"Far till ?"

"Till the merchan's."

"A'll nae hae time. The school'll seen be gyan in."

"Ou, fint a fears o' ye. Ye'll hae plenty time. Heest ye an' rin a' yer feet."

"Fat is't for ?"

"A yaird an' a half o' fite tape an' a pennyworth o' red herrin'. Min' that—a yaird an' a half o' fite tape an' a pennyworth o' red herrin'. Rin noo."

Jeamie started—ostensibly unwilling, but in point of fact overjoyed. He saw clearly that, run as he liked, he was bound to be late for his school. He thought of it for a minute, and then threw his bonnet into the air. Moreover, his mouth watered as in imagination he heard the merchant say, "Hae, here's a sweetie tae ye." He had fully half a mile to cover as the turnpike goes, but he rolled his tongue round an imaginary lozenge, and took a near cut through the fields.

"Ye're in a richt soogh, Jeamie," cried a school-mate, who saw him start.

"A'm A?" replied Jeamie, and held on.

He didn't even stay to look for a stone at the sight of a "yaldie" perched within easy range. But the race is not to the swift. As he sped through a ploughed field, repeating, "A yaird an' a half o' fite tape," etc., he stumbled on one of the furrows and fell. The fall knocked the "yaird an' a half o' fite tape," etc., out of his mind. He stood for a few minutes in the middle of the ploughed field, glowering into the black earth, visibly hurting himself in attempts to recollect what he had been

sent for. But it was all in vain. For the moment the "yaired an' a half o' fite tape," etc., had passed into the crypt of forgotten things as completely as ever a "blob," and Jeamie Gordon had blown thousands, had vanished into nothingness. He turned and set off for home again. When he was nearing the house, and beginning in consequence to feel considerably down in the heart, he luckily met a very little boy, who was evidently bursting with self-conceit, for he took very much longer strides than a mere boy should. The cause of the little boy's swagger was the temporary possession of a borrowed article which he carried ostentatiously in his hand.

"Fat's that?" said Jeamie, standing up and looking at him.

"A tape line tae my da," said the boy.

"Dine't, A min' noo," said Jeamie, slapping his leg, and running off once more to the merchant's.

"A min' noo. A yaired an' a half o' fite tape an' a pennyworth o' red herrin'."

In due time he reached the merchants.

"Weel, my mannike, fat wis't the day?"

"A pennyworth o'——a yaired an' a half o' red herrin'."

"Hoot, toot."

"A pennyworth o' fite tape an' a yaird an' a half o' red—"

"It'll be a yaird an' a half o' fite tape an' a pennyworth o' red herrin'."

"Ay," said Jeamie.

"Ye'll get that," said the merchant.

Jeamie looked at the drawer labelled "lozenges."

"Noo, then," said the merchant, handing Jeamie his errands, "ye'll need a' yer time for yer skweel, my mannikie."

Jeamie took a longer time than was necessary to put his errands into his pockets, and he looked back several times at the drawer labelled "lozenges" before he reached the shop-door, but "Ticht Wecht" made a pretence of being busy.

Jeamie was in no hurry home. Passing a field of turnips, he pulled a respectable bulb with a vicious tug, fixed it on to the top of a paling post, and, imagining it to be "Ticht Wecht," revenged himself by pelting it with stones. He grinned when he succeeded in toppling it over. But he came in sight of his home at a gallop, and sure enough his grandmother was on the lookout for him.

"Come awa' ye lazy monymint. Fat's keepit ye a' this time?"

"Od A couldna' come seener."

"Let's see yer erran's, then, an' rin awa' tae yer skweel as fast as ye can."

"A'm nae gyan. A'm ahin'."

"Ye are gyan—ahin' or nae ahin'."

"Boohoo, boohoo. A'm nae gyan. A'm ahin'."

"My certy, lad, gin ye anger me ye'll catch't. Walk awa' tae yer skweel there this meenit. Div ye hear me? Walk awa' tae yer skweel there this meenit or A'll gyang het fit up tae Babbie's wi' ye mysel'."

"Boohoo, boohoo. A'm nae gyan. A'm ahin'."

Mammie Gordon was a woman of her word, and was promptly on the way to Babbie Macgregor's academy, marching her recalcitrant grandson before her, and frequently mending his dilatory pace with smart applications of a broom "cowe." And while she is thus engaged we shall take the opportunity of introducing the reader to Babbie Macgregor and her academy.

Babbie was far and away the leading school-mistress in Braefoot. She (and we have her own words for it) had the finest tongue for pronunciation that was to be found in the profession. In support of this claim, she would put the member in question out and invite you to take particular notice of its hardness as compared with that of others she could mention. Further, she asserted that whenever a

scholar of hers went to the school up the brae, the master could tell at once by the finer style of his pronunciation that he had had the peculiar privilege of sitting at the feet of Babbie Macgregor. Babbie had expectations. She lived on the eve of inheriting a large fortune. An uncle of hers had died abroad, and the documents entitling her father to £30,000 had actually been delivered into his hands by William Thriest, the postmaster, but not knowing what the packet contained, he had refused it, because there were a few shillings to pay for the postage. By way of encouraging the attendance, Babbie often told her scholars that when she came into her inheritance she would have them all "dressed tae death" in the Macgregor tartan. The scholars used to go to the academy in the morning fully believing that at dinner time they would return to their astonished parents in "tartan array." The academy was Babbie's kitchen—a little square room with one small window. "Spreckly" and "Lucky Jack,"—two hens which she kept—roosted on the couples. The curriculum consisted of the "Abercy" (A B C), the "Carriges" (Catechism), and the Bible. Once, but only once, she essayed into the regions of higher education. It was in the case of Johnnie Scott, a lad of parts. She had found a few leaves of a geography which had been

lost by some scholar from the school up the brae, and Johnnie with appropriate ceremony was put on to the "gogrify." She was proud of Johnnie's geographical learning, and whenever a visitor came to the academy, the "gogrify" class was called up, and put through an examination.

"Spell Scotland."

"S c o t l a n d."

"Spell sea."

"S e a."

"Spell mountain."

"M o u n t a i n."

"Rin awa' tae yer seat noo."

"Most extr'ord'nar!" was the visitor's unfailing comment on these occasions. But this comment was once varied by Betty Fleming, who in consequence lives in history.

"Michty, Babbie," said she, "fat an uptak'! Gweed safe the laddie, but A doot he's ower clever tae live lang."

Nothing further is remembered of Betty Fleming.

After these examinations, as a mark of her special favour and in recognition of his extraordinary gifts, Johnnie would get a drink of cold tea out of a hot egg-shell to sweeten his breath. Babby was so highly pleased with the success of

her "gogrify" class that she once wondered where she could lay her hands on a map. Jeamie Gordon, who was jealous of the "gogrify" class, spoke, loud enough to be heard, and said, "O bit I've ane at hame—a she ane."

When Babbie would be very busy with her needle her scholars would seek out one by one until they were all free, and go and play themselves in a large gravel hole which was close by the academy. Then, when she discovered that she was alone, she would seek them out and drive them all back to school again like a "brodmal" of chickens. But there was a fierce enough side to Babbie's character. She administered punishment with what she called the "belt an' the buckle," and in her tempers often threatened to "tak' the keil (blood) oot o' their hides." She had also a long pole which reached from where she sat to all the corners of the academy, and with it she kept the wilder spirits in subjection. A large black chest sat in one of the corners, and in it some of the most refractory were occasionally confined.

It was to Babbie M'Gregor's Academy that Jeamie Gordon was being escorted, as we have already noticed, by his grandmother. When they arrived at the door, Mammie Gordon opened it and went in, dragging Jeamie behind her.

"See, Babbie, here's a loon 'at's nae willin' tae come till's skweel the day."

"Fat," said Babbie, "ye dinna mean tae tell me 'at ane o' the cleverest o' my scholars was refeesin' tae come till's skweel."

"Ay, jeist," said Jeamie's grandmother.

"That is a story 'at ye're tellin' me noo, Mistress Gordon, an' me jeist thinkin' o' pittin' 'im on tae the gogrify."

"Min' Babbie (winking at the mistress), A'm gi'ein' ye full leeberty tae gie 'im his wheeps."

"Ou, bit he'll nae need tae be wheepit. He'll be a gweed laddie an' nae dae't again. Come awa' ben tae yer steel here, Jamie, an' sit doon. Ye wad never learn tae be a braw, weel-dressed minister if ye didna bide at yer skweel."

Jeamie slunk away to his seat.

Babbie convoyed Mammie Gordon down the street on her way home for a considerable distance. The scholars, in her absence, improved the shining hour as scholars in such circumstances generally do. When she returned she found the door barred, and heard them charging "Spreckly" and "Lucky Jack" round and round the academy. She went to the window and there was silence.

"Open the door this meenit there."

"Will ye nae gie's the belt an' the buckle then," said a voice.

"Open the door this meenit, ye aggravatin' vratches."

Jannetie Winter, who was white with fear, ran to unbar the door.

"Dinna dae't, Jannetie."

Jannetie did.

Babbie entered, shaking with rage, and armed herself with the "belt an' the buckle."

"Fa fleggit doon Spreckly an' Lucky Jack?"

"Jeamie Gordon."

"The scoonrell!" said Babbie, making for Jeamie with the "belt an' the buckle."

Jeamie dodged her, and for a few minutes there was what the lion tamer of the menagerie calls a lion hunt.

Eventually Jeamie was captured and subdued, and finally incarcerated in the black chest.

Seated on the lid of the chest, Babbie began to lecture her scholars on their conduct, but her moralizings were suddenly and rudely punctuated with a full stop. A vigorous kick from Jeamie Gordon had fairly knocked the end out of the black chest. Then there followed a scene which the scholars never forgot. When it ended Babbie had hardly breath enough left to say, "Gether up

yer leaves an' mak' oot o' this ye ill-brocht-up weeterykin an' niver" (shaking her fist) "let—me—see—you—pit a fit in ower my skweel door again. Hame wi' ye!"

Next morning Jeamie Gordon went to the school up the brae.

CHAPTER X.

During a Spate.

THERE was a "sooch" in the minister's "widdy." All the afternoon a flock of crows had been wheeling in a mad fantastic reel over the lotted lands on the haugh. Little boys coming home from school sang—

"Craw, craw,
Yer mither's awa'
For poother an' lead tae shot ye a'."

For two hours the conduct of Peter Tam's pig had been outrageous—not at all what might be reasonably expected from a grunter so well favoured, so richly and so regularly dieted. Moreover, there was abundance of the good things of this world in its trough, a circumstance which greatly intensified the gross absurdity of its behaviour.

"It's clean gyte," said his spouse Meggie.

Is'bell Jott's ducks, who spent their days in the kirk burn and their nights in the hen-house, seemed

"To do nothing but quack
The whole of the long day through,"

and Is'bell Jott herself sat, or rather lay, in her armchair by the ingle, terribly "wechtit doon."

All this, to say nothing of the murky clouds that brooded over the sources of the burns far away up amongst the hills, portended rain.

"Ay, we're gyan tae get dyow," said Macwhirter, who had taken a step out the length of the bridge to survey the sky.

"A'm dootin't. Wo, Betty. Let's see a spunk fae ye, Sandy," said Peter Tam.

"The gless is doon," continued the Souter.

"Ay?"

"Ay, she's been fa'in' fest for a day or twa."

"Bit if ye notice, Sandy, we're generally sure o' a day or twa o' some kin' o' weather aboot this time o' the year."

"True," replied the Souter, and his eyes began to sparkle out of a growing nimbus of merry wrinkles.

"Weesh, Betty. It's time A wis lowsed," said Peter, starting off in a profound cogitation as to the cause of the souter's merriment. Peter always suffered from a feeling of being found out when the souter smiled.

The rain began to fall about six o'clock—a steady "on-ding." Soon a crystal fringe of water was pouring from the thatch eaves of the houses

and streaming across the causeways into the turbid gutters, which were hurrying along the kerbstone with as much light rubbish as they could possibly float, fully intent upon choking the gaping branders. As the pelting shower increased and struck myriad little jets of water out of the gathering pools, the streets became more and more deserted. Johnny Peat's tame seagull appeared on the Square, looking very much as if it had just strolled out to write an ode. Wading there amongst the muddy pools, it was quite evidently dreaming of blue waters and white-crested waves.

Half-an-hour after the commencement of the rain there were only two people (I am not counting the loons who were vainly trying to dam the gutters with mud) to be seen out of doors—Bella Lowrie and Jeames Nicol. Bella went up one street and down another. She had a new umbrella. Jeames was a mile from home when he was caught in the shower, and "sweer Jeames" always took five-and-thirty minutes to the mile. He was once known to quicken his pace, but that is part of the story of Dykeside's mad stirk

"Ye nicht hae jowed yer ginger a bittie, goodman, an' nae gotten sic a dabblin," said Tibbie. "Ye'll be weet tae the skin, I'se warrant. Gae awa' butt tae the passage there an' dreep a meenit;

the watter's stoorin' oot o' yer pooches there as if it was comin' fae a rooser. Pit aff yer quyte, man. Michty! fat a wecht! It'll nae dry in a week's time. Is yer feet weet?"

"Sypin," said Jeames.

"Ye'll better tak' yer porritch an' mak' for yer bed," said Tibbie; "an' A'll hing yer claes ower a chair afore the fire."

The streets, however, were not long to be left to the loons. The burn was beginning to show signs of a "growe," and men were turning out one by one—the ultra-careful with coats over their heads—to have a look at its whitening waters, and speculate.

Suddenly, a heavy torrent came tumbling down the straight brae, and turning the corner at Betty Shanks', sped down the side of the street like a river, flooding all the low-lying tenements in its course.

Betty's door, which had been off the sneck, was unceremoniously burst open, and before she had time to jump from her stool by the ingle, her peat fire expired with a hiss, and her kettle, which had erstwhile been singing quite merrily, hung silent over the flood. She managed to shut the door, but the water would not be barred out. Then her head appeared at the skylight.

"For the love o' Gweed," she cried, "somebody redd the bran'er!"

"It'll nae redd," said San'ers Naughty, who was hurrying past; "it's as fu' o' rubbitch as an egg—"

He was going to say, "as an egg's fu' o' meat," but he heard the roar of the kirk burn, and ran off towards the bridge.

"That's a gey watter," said one of the dozen men who had gathered to that favourite spot.

"Ay, an' she's aye growin'," was the reply; "she's up fow'r inch onywy sin' I cam' tae."

The burn, as was its wont in times of heavy rain up the hills, had come rushing down all of a sudden, several feet deep. It galloped on, rumbling and roaring the while, as if it had fully made up its mind to reach the Swift in two minutes or die in the attempt.

"Ay, A doot we'll hae some tribble wi' 'er the nicht, lads," began Macwhirter, by way of starting an interchange of reminiscences.

"A min' on jeist sic a seem'lar nicht, seven year ago," said Dauvit Guthrie. "That wis the time 'at she washed awa' your dykie, Peter."

"Sae weel's A min'," observed the carter; "it's nae ilka rainy day 'at a chiel gets a five-year-aulder floatit intil's yaird."

"A min' on that," broke in Tammas Lowrie,

"that wis the kyard's beastie. Tent, horse, cairt, an' a'thing cam' doon. A canna think hoo the bodies themsel's escapit that nicht."

"'Twis a miracle," said the Souter.

"Ay, 'twis a providence," added San'ers Whyte.

"Not one o' them wis drooned."

"No," said the gravedigger regretfully, "not even one."

"A min' ae hairst 'at she cam' doon," said Rob Carruthers, the thatcher, "an' broke oot upon the haugh doon anent——"

"That wis the time 'at she took ~~ae~~ the shoglin' briggie," jerked in Willie Thow, the tailor.

"A'm spikin', Thowie," said Rob. "A min' ae hairst, as A wis sayin', 'at she cam' doon an'——"

"Is she aye growin'?" interrupted the smith, who had just returned after a ten minutes' shelter in the smithy.

"Ay," said the Souter, "she's up past the stickie noo, Smith."

"It's time 'at we wis a' hame daimin' up the slappies in case be."

"A'm fearin' that, Smith," said Peter Tam.

The gathering scaled, each cringing into whatever shelter he had from the drenching downpour.

The majority seemed to be perfectly satisfied with the somewhat scanty shelter offered by their trousers pockets.

Notwithstanding the prevailing wet, Duncan Ewart, the Braefoot poacher, was dry, and so betook himself to the Harrow Inn on the off chance of getting something there to ease the arid trouble in his throat. Duncan had no money. Jane, his infinitely wiser half, took very good care of that. He had exactly the same amount of credit, but he was dry unto the spitting of "sax-pences," and would beg since he couldn't purchase.

"Ay, Lucky," said Duncan to the Landlady of the Harrow, who was comfortably seated in her cosy kitchen.

"Weel, Duncan," said Lucky.

"Weet."

"It's nae free o't."

"That's a richt dowg o' yours," (pointing to Tweed, stretched on a rug before the fire).

"Ou, ay, he's a quate brute."

"Ah! he's a richt dowg that. A bet ye five pounds if ye sent 'im tae the show he'd get a prize."

"Na, A dinna think he's o' the prize kin'."

"Ay is he. He's a fine dowg—splendid dowg."

A hinna seen the better o' 'im. Sen' ye 'im tae the first dowg show, an' A'll guarantee he'll get a prize."

"A'll nae bather sen'in' 'im fae hame, Duncan."

"Let's see a nippy fae ye, Lucky. A'm clean on the rocks the nicht, an' A'm yawfu' bad."

"Ye'll get naething here withoot money, Duncan."

"Ah! ye're a dirty —. Ay are ye. That's fat ye are, an' yer dowg'll niver get a prize."

"Get oot o' this, Duncan Ewart, ye ill-tongued scoonrel, an' nae bad-use fowk at their ain fire-side."

Duncan retired, but only to the other end of the house, where there happened to be a few kindred spirits who needed not the excellent excuse of the rain for being found in the comfortable shelter of the Harrow.

He opened the room door.

"Hullo, Dunc."

"Come awa', Dunc."

"Gie's yer han', Dunc, my chielie."

Duncan went in to his boon companions, closed the door, and drank merrily, not knowing that this was to be his final "spree."

Meanwhile sober men had serious work on hand. The rain had been falling fast and steadily. The

kirk burn had risen rapidly and overflowed its banks. Those who, like Peter Tam, lived close to its run had been strenuously but vainly endeavouring to protect themselves against its pillaging incursions. Peter had already come by a big loss—his pig. The waters had flooded the sty, and Peter with his axe had struck off one or two of the bars to enable the dumb brute to escape with its life. It got safely out of the sty, but alas! on Peter attempting to drive it beyond the reach of danger, with characteristic consistency it refused to be driven. It chose rather to go the opposite way—deeper and deeper into the flood. Peter clutched it by the tail, but with a shriek of triumph it rushed forward into the swollen current and was carried off. Peter had no “chack” on his conscience. He did everything that mortal man could do to save the sow-born fanatic from its untimely fate.

“O man,” said he, relating the tragedy, “A never saw sic pigheadedness.”

Peter mourned the event for many a day. But in this wonderful world of ours there is never anything actually lost. Away down at the mouth of the Swift there was a family who had an ample supply of salted pork during the following winter.

The burn at the doon-the-toon end of the vil-

lage had also broken out, and was causing considerable damage and uproar. Many of the tenements there were flooded.

"She jeist cam' doon like that," said Sam'l Harris.

"That," was a clap of his hands.

Its overflow waters were working their way up both sides of the front street to meet those of its wilder and more dreaded neighbour.

Finding that the calamity with which she had been visited was pretty general, Betty Shanks had become reconciled to her fate, and stood peering at the dull, sodden prospect from the skylight.

Although darkness was setting in quickly, Betty could yet distinguish the figure of a woman hurrying excitedly to and fro on the street without even a "shooter shallie" to protect her from the rain.

Jane Ewart had lost her boy.

"Hiv ye seen my loonie?" she was crying in at every window. Nobody had seen him.

People became alarmed for the boy's safety. Wangie Lowrie had been packed off to bed out of harm's way, and was sleeping soundly. His mother went and shook him.

"Stoppit, man, ye din't thing!" said he, "or A'll gi'e ye a clout on the mou'."

"Did ye see little Ewartie the nicht?" said his mother.

Wangie rubbed his eyes.

"Ay, A saw 'im stan'in' b' 'imself' on the railway briggie lookin' at the burn."

"Puir laddie," said Mistress Lowrie.

The landlady of the Harrow Inn, hearing people hurrying past, went to the door.

"Fat's a' the hurly-burly about?" she cried.

"Little Ewartie's droon't," said a laddie.

"God Almichty!" exclaimed Duncan Ewart, who overheard it. In a minute he was out staggering in the plashy square, followed by his fellow revellers.

Little Ewartie took after his mother. He was top of his class at school. Evidently he was a favourite with the gods. He was bonnie. His long fair curls were the pride of his mother, Jane Ewart, and he had eyes like bits of God's blue sky. He was one of those little boys who find themselves in the world and begin to wonder. He plied Mr. Bright, the schoolmaster, with strange wondering questions, generally beyond common, often beyond human knowledge.

"Jeames," Mr. Bright would say when he was puzzled, "that's no in my depairtment."

"Little Ewartie's droon't!" The news spread

to every corner of the village in an instant. Crowds gathered about the bridge and the banks of the burn discussing the startling event.

"He wis a bricht laddie, Ewartie."

"Ay, yon laddie wad hae come tae something."

"But he'd aye an ither-warl' kin' o' a wy about 'im."

"Ay, puir chielie, he aye min't me o' the picturs o' young fowk 'at ye see drawn in the big Bibles."

"Weel, weel," said Tibbie Nicol, "he's in a better place. Puir Jane! May the Lord look till 'er 'at can dae't. It's tae be howpit it'll be a lesson tae Duncan."

"Hech, sirs!" said Mistress Nauchty; and Mistress Peat, the smith's wife, said "There's aye sorra some gate."

Duncan, considerably sobered, and accompanied by three or four men, took a lantern and started off down the burn, intending to go to where its bed broadened, thinking haply they might there find some trace of the lost boy. But they only managed to get about half-way down. There the burn had cut a wide gap in the bank, washing away about a quarter of an acre of Jeames Nicol's land, and forming a large muddy lake out on the haugh. While skirting the gap, Duncan "stytered"

too near the soft edge, which immediately gave way, and landed him broadside on a huge boulder. He had to be lifted up, for he had broken one of his legs. With much difficulty the men carried him home.

"O! my loonie! my loonie!" groaned Jane Ewart when she heard them at the door.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," said Mr. Black the minister, who was seated at her side speaking words of comfort. The two halves of the door were opened, and Duncan was carried into the kitchen.

"Duncan's gotten his leg broken," said one of the men.

Alas! with what breathless hurry does one calamity often follow another.

Roused from her grief by the necessity for action, Jane Ewart had Duncan lifted into the bed, and then went to the room, where she very seldom had an errand, to rummage the drawers for a cloth to bandage the fracture until the doctor could be summoned.

In a quiet corner of the room, hidden by the drawers, whither he had gone to read, sat little Ewartie, sound asleep, with the "Pilgrim's Progress" lying open upon his knee.

Jane Ewart screamed.

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The rain continued to pour down until far on into the night, and it was only when it ceased and a slight wind sprang up that the people considered it safe to go to bed. In the morning, when the sun rose over Ben Alder, it smiled sweetly upon a picture in which there was much to beget a brood of the saddest reflections. Henceforward there lived no steadier man than "Cripple Dunc."

CHAPTER XI.

A Friendly Match.

ONCE there came a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Braefoot C.C. It was marked "immediate," and lay in the Post Office for a week.

"Braefit C.C. Fat's that again?" said William Thriest, postmaster, as he looked at it day after day.

"Wad it be the clothin' fond, Weelum?" said Mistress Thriest, his assistant.

"Poof! The fond hasna a secretar."

William knew of one "secretar" only in Braefoot—the "secretar" of the "Lodge" of which he himself was Senior Warden. So the letter lay undelivered until one day Jamie Macpherson, Secretary of the Braefoot C.C., appeared at the Post Office counter and exclaimed, "Queen's head!"

Having been supplied with a postage stamp instead, he fixed it on to a letter, clenched his fist, and hammered away at it with as much energy and determination as if he had sworn a solemn

oath to knock brains out of it. Then he produced a dirty piece of paper headed "Subscription List," and said rather bashfully—

"Wull ye gie's onything for the C.C., Weelum?"

"The C.C. Fat's that again?"

"The Cricket Club."

"Dyod, there's a letter here for the Secretar', Braefit C.C. A won'er——"

"That's me. Gie's't!"

Jamie got the letter and instantly disappeared, forgetting altogether about the subscription.

That night there was a meeting of the Braefoot C.C. They met in a corner of the market green, and the secretary sat on the topmost rail of the fence.

"Fats the meetin' aboot?" said Wulkie, who was overlooked in not being a member of the committee.

"Shut ye up, Wulkie," said the secretary. "The meetin's nae begun yet. Wait till the captain comes."

"Michty! ye're richt big aboot it," said Wulkie.

When the captain came, the secretary "ripped" his "oxter pooch" with great ceremony and deliberation, and handed him a letter. The captain read aloud :—

ABERDUFF, 3rd June, 18—

Secretary, Braefoot C.C.

Dear Sir,—The Aberduff C.C. would like to play a friendly match with your club at Braefoot on Saturday the 17th inst. Let me know if you agree.

Yours truly,

WM. SMART, *Secretary.*

"It's a challans," said Wulkie.

"Is't?" said the secretary. "They're jeist wantin's tae play a cricket match. That's fat it is."

"Weel, then, that's a challans," maintained Wulkie.

"O, ay, it's a challans richt enuegh," said the captain.

"Wull we play them?"

"Of coorse we'll play them."

"We'll need a composeetion ba'," said Wulkie.

"Shut ye up, Wulkie," (secretary again). "Ye're nae in the Co-mittee. We can play wi' the gutta-perka."

"Ye canna play a challans wi' the guttaperka."

"No," said the captain, "it'll need tae be a composeetion. Hoo muckle's in the funds?"

"Three an' fow'rpence."

"Is that a'? We'll hae tae cadge."

"Syne the refreshments," continued Wulkie.

"We ken a' that," said the secretary. "Lemonade, cheese, and biscuits."

"Hoo mony bottles?"

"Eleven on every side, twa empires, twa scorers—twenty-six bottles. Them 'at's nae playin' disna get nae refreshments."

"We'll hae tae cadge the hale toon the nicht," said the captain, "tae raise the funds."

"Fa's tae be the bowlers?" observed Wulkie.

"Dounder's a good bowler. He sud be ane."

"Dounder's nae in the co-mittee," said the secretary; "the captain'll bowl."

"Dounder's a strechter bowler gin you, Phersony."

"O ay, Dounder's a good bowler," said the captain; "him an' me'll bowl."

"Bit ye'll need three bowlers," said the secretary.

"Twa's plenty," said Wulkie. "Phersony's near greetin'."

"Am A? A'll mak' mair runs gin you onywy, Wulkie."

"Mebbe ay an' mebbe no," said Wulkie.

"Goosie'll be wicket-keeper," said the captain, "he has the hardest han's. Wull ye, Goosie?"

"O ay."

"An' Spinnle'll be backstowp. He's nae feart for's shins. Eh, Spinnle?"

"A' richt."

"Then that's a' thing settled," said the captain. "Macpherson 'll write them 'at we'll play them on the seventeenth. We'll hae practice every nicht at seven o'clock, an' A'll pint oot faur every chap has tae stan' an' field."

Then the meeting adjourned in a body to "cadge."

Saturday, the seventeenth instant, duly arrived. Young Braefoot was all agog, nor was old Braefoot utterly indifferent, for here and there a few greybeards with green hearts sat on the dyke which bounded one side of the green and composed themselves with tobacco to witness the fortunes of the struggle. A motley crowd was gathered in the vicinity of the lemonade, cheese, and biscuits.

"They're comin', they're comin'," shouted a six-year-old enthusiast, who thereupon stood on his head.

The Aberduffers drove down to the green, and when they jumped out of the brake, glorious in cricket caps, they caused a sensation.

"Michty," said one urchin, "whatten duvvels."

"Good Go'," said another.

"Crickey!" exclaimed a third.

The rival teams hovered about opposite ends of

the green for some minutes. Gradually they drew nearer and nearer until the captains stood face to face.

"Chise for the bats," said Wulkie.

"A finger or a finger, or a thum', thum' thum'," was on the tip of the Braefoot captain's tongue, when the captain of the Aberduff team whirled a bat into the air.

"Roon' or flat?"

"Roon'."

The Braefoot captain won the toss and elected to defend the wickets. The captain of the Aberduff team thereupon set to work and placed his field.

"Fa's in first for oor side?" said Wulkie.

"The captain an' the secretary," replied the Braefoot scorer.

The captain and the secretary were soon ready. The secretary had stripped himself of his jacket and waistcoat and cap. He had a belt round his middle, the sleeves of his shirt rolled up, and altogether had the general appearance of having a "century" in his eye.

"We'll see hoo muckle ye'll mak', Phersony," said Wulkie, as the two batsmen moved off.

They reached the wickets.

"Centre," said the secretary.

"In a bittie. In a bittie yet. Oot a bittie. In a bittie. Dead."

"Trial."

"Play."

The Aberduff bowler delivered an easy trial which the secretary scraped to square leg. The second deliverance was of the "express" order, and was past the wickets before he had sufficient time to draw his bat. He seemed rather prejudiced against the third, for he stood somewhat wide of the wickets. Down it came, and breaking its way on to the off stump, despatched the secretary with a "duck's egg" to his credit. The Aberduffers clapped their hands and congratulated the bowler.

"Good ba', Hodgie."

"Bonnie ba', Hodgie."

The crestfallen secretary walked away towards the lemonade, cheese, and biscuits, with a painful lump of chagrin growing in his throat.

"Hoo muckle did ye mak', Phersony?" said Wulkie.

Wulkie was the next to bat. His first hit was to long off for two. Cheers loud and long rose from the crowd. The captain and Wulkie rapidly raised the score to thirteen, of which Wulkie had nine, when "How's that?" said the bowler.

"Out," said the umpire, who happened to be looking in the opposite direction.

"Fat for?" said Wulkie.

"L.b.w.," said the bowler.

"Michty," said the Braefoot captain, "he wisna l.b.w."

"He wis l.b.w.," said the bowler.

"A wis naething o' the kin' l.b.w.," shouted Wulkie, "an' the ba' struck me abeen the belt."

"Fair play, fair play" (from the crowd approaching), "ye're jeist wantin' tae get Wulkie oot 'cause he's makin' owre muckle runs."

"The empire says he wis oot, an' if he disna go we'll stop the match," said the bowler, throwing down the ball.

"Oot ye go then, Wulkie," said the Braefoot captain.

Wulkie threw down the bat, and was escorted by the sympathetic and protesting crowd back to the vicinity of the lemonade, cheese, and biscuits.

Dounder was the next to go in, and by dint of blocking "carried his bat." All throughout the innings the scoring was frequent, and when the last wicket fell the total stood at the splendid figure of fifty-three. The refreshments followed. Then while the urchins were "dreepin'" the lemonade bottles, the match was resumed. It was now

the Aberduffers' turn to handle the willow. The captain and Hodgie, the bowler, were the first to go in.

"Ready," said Hodgie, when he had received centre.

Dounder opened the attack. His first ball (after trial) was blindly driven by Hodgie for three. The Aberduffers raised a tumultuous cheer. His next despatched the captain. This time the cheer rose from the crowd.

"Next man," cried Wulkie.

"Nae hurry," from the Aberduffers.

"Next man," repeated Wulkie.

The next man went in, and play proceeded. Scoring was slow, and Hodgie's wicket fell at five. His successor, however, seemed more at home with the bat, and he and his companion rapidly doubled the score. Then one of them made a beautiful hit to leg, over which feat the Aberduffers waxed exceedingly jubilant.

"Bonnie deen, Doeval."

"Run again, Wowie."

"Ane for the shy, Doeval."

But alas! "ane for the shy" was one too many, and Doeval was stumped.

"How's that?"

"Out."

"It's nae oot. Dinna go, Doeval."

"He is oot. He wis mair gin a fit oot o's grun'."

"Ye're nae oot. Dinna go, Doeval."

"Oor man gaed oot," said the Braefoot captain.

"We're nae carin'. Doeval's nae oot."

"Gie up the bat," said Wulkie.

"Nae for you."

Wulkie closed with Doeval and wrested the bat from his grasp. Doeval thereupon planted a violet beneath Wulkie's right eye. Wulkie threw down the bat.

"Come on," said he, "if ye want a fecht."

"Face up, Doeval."

They "faced up," and in the first round Doeval went sprawling on the grass. Then for about five minutes the fight was free.

"Come on oot o' this," said the Aberduff captain, leading the way.

"Hame ye go," cried Wulkie, "ye canna fecht nor ye canna play cricket."

"We can thrash Braefit mice ony day."

"Niver! That wis niver in Aiberduff skyters."

"Braefit mice."

"Aiberduff skyters."

"Braefit mice."

"Aiberduff skyters."

And the Aberduffers disappeared off the green, up the street, and away.

CHAPTER XII.

A "Forenicht" in the Winter Time.

IN Braefoot they used to congratulate one another when the snow fell. Then the stream of active life, always sluggish, practically froze. The goodman of the house welcomed it, and bethought him of many quiet pipes by the heartsome ingle, and also many couthy "forenichts" with his neighbours, San'ers, Weelum, or Dauvit. The goodwife welcomed it, too, for then the modest kingdom over which she reigned supreme acquired an importance and a charm which it lacked when the goodman could puff his smoke into the summer air and the bairns chase butterflies in the meadows. But above all it was welcomed by the bairns. If it fell in the form of hail, they would march about the streets, holding out their hands to catch it, singing the while—

" Rainy, rainy rattlestones,
Dinna rain on me ;
Rain on John o' Groat's hoose,
Far ower the sea."

If it fell in the form of flakes, they would romp about laughing and shouting, ever endeavouring

with their tattered hats and bonnets to "flap" the "wee white birdies." Then in the long dark nights, while they slept and with only the light of the blinking stars, "Johnnie Frosty" would come to their windows and draw pictures of fairyland for them, the like of which were never to be found in their picture books. O, those thrilling adventures in that wonderful country when they opened their eyes in the morning!

"Are ye up yet?" their mothers would cry.

"Ay," would be the reply as they still sat abed and off they would start again on the little white pony of imagination through the shining passes and the silver woods, over the glistening mountains, and on and on to the marble palaces on the wild white beetling cliffs. And they brought the wonder of those adventures downstairs with them, too, labouring away at their porridge and milk with a strange forewandered dazzle in their eyes. But I might fill a book all about the joys of the bairns in the long winter time and even then I am certain that the very first shivering, red-nosed urchin I would meet would immediately convince me that I had only just tapped the subject.

One winter's evening Sandy Macwhirter was snugly seated at Tammas Lowrie's fireside. He had called to give Tammas a "forenicht." He had

been in by the smithy on his way down, and Andrew Peat, the blacksmith, was to follow.

"It's a braw floer fan the snaw's on the grun'," said Sandy, pointing to the fire.

"Sal is't," said the goodman, drawing his chair closer to it.

Tammas's fire was a peat one, with a mighty background of sawdust. Every now and again there was a slip of sawdust into the fire, and a cloud of short-lived sparks would vanish up the chimney. The bairns were bedded. The goodwife was seated at her own side of the ingle, busy with her needle, while the cat playfully dribbled her pirl of black thread across and across the floor.

"Licht yer cutty, Sandy," said the goodman, who was smoking.

Sandy produced his "clay" from his waistcoat pocket and applied a light, but the result was unsatisfactory.

"Stappit?" suggested the goodman.

Sandy's efforts to make the smoke come were suggestive of a heavily laden train puffing and blowing up a steep incline.

"Confoon' 'er!" said he.

"Pit a girse up 'er, Maister Macwhirter," said the goodwife, handing him a grass out of a 'wisker."

"That's it noo, goodwife," said Sandy, speaking from out a thickening cloud of smoke.

There were a few thuds at the cheek of the outside door, and in came the blacksmith as white as a miller with snowdrift.

"Come awa', An'ra," said the goodman.

"Gweed be aboot's, Maister Peat," said the goodwife, "is't dingin' oot that gate."

"Deed is't, 'oman, an' blawin' extr'or'ner. Gin it conteenas like this it'll nae be mowse tae ventur oot ower the door."

"Shak' yersel' an' sit in tae the fire, An'ra," said the goodman.

Andrew seated himself between the goodman and Sandy.

"It's some time sin' we've had sic a kittle storm," said Andrew, lighting his pipe.

"It's aboot sax year," said Sandy.

"Jeist exactly, Maister Macwhirter," put in the goodwife; "that wis the winter 'at oor Jannetie wis born, an' she'll be sax noo come the time."

"Fat gars me min' sae weel on't," continued Sandy, "it wis the first winter 'at Donal' M'Clue, the p'leece, wis here. Donal', he thocht 'at he would pit a stop tae Maister Bricht's loons slidin' on the straight brae. We got a mighty lauch 'at 'im that time. Ae day I wis stan'in' enjoyin' the

sicht o' the loons—half a dizzen at a time—comin' fungin' doon the brae on a railway sleeper. Donal' gaed slinkin' intae a corner aboot half-wy up the brae, faur the loons cudna see 'im, an' waitet till some o' them wad come doon anent 'im. An' he hadna lang tae wait, either, for the loons 'at the head o' the brae gae a cheer, jeist as if they were launchin' a ship, an' doon comes a sleeper wi' aucht o' them aboard it. Donal' heard them comin, and jeist as they were aboot anent 'im he sprang oot tae collar them, but the sleeper suppit the feet fae 'im, an' doon he fell flap into the hert o' the loons, an' they carried him aff hale wheel tae the fit o' the brae wi' them. Betty Shanks saw them scuddin' across Heich Street. 'Weel, weel,' said Betty, 'that is hit noo. There'll be nae guidin' o' the loons efter this, noo 'at they've gotten the p'leece tae gyang slidin' wi' them.' Afore Donal' wis weel on's feet the loons were half up the brae again, an' ane o' them cried doon, 'Haul up the sleeper wi' ye, Donal'.'"

"They haena stoppit that protick yet, Maister Macwhirter," said the goodwife, who was just mending a hole in the nether side of her hopeful son, Wangie's, knickerbockers.

"Na," said Sandy, "an' niver wull. For a lang time naething nettled Donal' waur than tae hint

about 'im slidin' wi' the loons. He canna thole't even yet."

"Ay, as ye say, Sandy, sax year ago wis a kittle time," said Andrew. "A min' there wis little daein' in the smiddy that winter. But if I min' richt it's jeist aboot twenty year ago sin' we had the yawfu' winter. It begood wi' a storm siclike's this."

"Twenty year's ago—let me see," said the good-wife. "It wis the followin' spring 'at oor Tammie wis laid doon. He wis jeist twa year an' a month. Hoo aul's your Teenie, Maister Macwhirter?"

"Twa-an'-twenty."

"Weel, your Teenie an' my Tammie wis ages. Noo, coont ye back."

"Ay, An'ra," said Sandy, "ye're richt; its jeist aboot twenty year ago. That wis the time 'at the line was blockit for aboot ten days."

"Ay, jeist exac'ly."

"A min' o' that," said the goodman. "A min' as weel's ye like the first day 'at the train managed tae mak' up the glen. We a' ran oot ower tae the station like a puckle bairns fan we heard 'er whussle."

"Ay, that wis a serious time," said Sandy. "The snaw wis aboot fower feet deep in places faur it wisna blawn an inch. I cudna see oot intae the square fae the shop winda for aboot fower month, the snaw was that sair bankit up."

There wis nae traffic on the streets, for it was impossible for cairts tae gyang. Dykeside, A min', tried his ploo ance or twice, but it wis nae eese—the horses cudna stamp it. Ye min' we had tae cut narra passages along the sides o' the hooses, an' then jine them here an' there wi' slappies tae let's across the streets. An' the frost that winter was something bias. There wisna a skyte o' watter aboot the toon hardly bit fat was frozen. A' the burns were fair dry an' level fae bank tae bank wi' ice an' drift. The Swift wis clean frozen ower at a' the pots, an' only a narra black strippie o' 'er wis to be seen in the middle faur she wis rinnin' at her fastest. Ay, that wis the sairest winter for beast an' body in a' my experience."

"That wis the winter 'at puir aul' Getherer slippit awa," said Andrew.

"Ay, 'twis me 'at had the coffin," said the goodman.

"It wis jeist in the hicht o' the storm, tae," continued Andrew.

"Ay," said the goodman, "we had a heap o' diffeeculties afore we got Getherer's corp the length o' the yaird. Ye min' we had tae turn oot a puckle o's, an' gie Tammas Winter a han' tae cut a road up the burn. Then the snaw wis blawn till a terrible extent in the yaird itsel'. Tammas had

tae gyang doon sax feet afore iver he got tae the yird. He niver had sic a job in's life, he said. He girmed veeciously aboot it at the time, an' niver spak a gweed word aboot aul' Getherer ahin't."

"He's a soor tyke, the gravedigger," said Sandy.

"Syne the minister he had been awa' at a preachin' some wy an' cudna get hame, an' we had tae get San'ers White riggit oot till offeeciate."

"But San'ers cud dae that," said Sandy.

"Ay, he's a gweed-livin' creatur, Maister White," said the goodwife.

"San'ers is gran' at gi'ein' a word o' prayer," said Andrew. "A've seen't sometimes jeist come on 'im a' in a rummle."

"O ay," said the goodman. "An' it blew terrible the day o' the beerial. The road 'at we had opened up tae the yaird wis jeist aboot blawn level again in some places. The coffin had to be carried shoolder high a' the wy tae the grave, an' I assure ye it wisna mowse, for aul' Getherer wisna a shavin'. A tell ye A wis richt thankfu' fan the job wis deen."

"He wis a browe aul' man, Maister Getherer," said the goodwife.

"The brak' up o' that storm taen aboot a puckle o' the aul' fowk," said Andrew.

"Ay, 'twis a serious winter," said Sandy. "It rins in my head 'at it wis the same winter 'at

Bell Strachan o' the hill wis gotten at death's door in her ain hoose wi' nae sae muckle's a drink o' watter in't."

"The same winter," said Andrew.

"Eh ay, sirs, that wis a sair case," said the goodwife.

"The neebor fowk," continued Sandy, "although they werena very far fae 'er, niver took ony thocht. It wis only fan they noticed 'at there wis nae reek comin' fae the lum 'at they began tae dread 'at a'thing wisna richt. Ane o' the men niver cower'd the burst 'at he got sheelin' a road up tae the hoosie, an' they werena there a meenit ower seen. They got Bell lyin' streekit oot at the fireside. She'd jeist been gyan awa' tae ken'le a bit fire fan she'd fail't. They said 'at she wis that corp-like 'at ye cud hardly tell't fither she wis in this warl' or the neist. But the men had a drappie speerits wi' them, an' they managed tae get a thimblefu' or twa o't ower her throat, an' that kin' o' brocht her roon a bittie."

"Fan ye're far awa' wi't like that," said the goodman, "there's naething that'll tak' ye back sae natrally's a drappie speerits."

"O ay, it's gweed enuegh int's ain place," said the goodwife.

"Bell," continued Sandy, "hadna gotten oot

ower the door for the feck o' a fortnicht. There wisna muckle mair nor the reef o' the hoosie tae be seen, it wis that sair blawn up wi' the snaw."

"'Twis a mercy 'at she didna manage tae licht 'er fire that mornin'," said the goodwife.

"Ay, there's a mixtur o' that in a'thing," said Andrew.

"Her neebor man seddled his beast," went on Sandy, "an' rode doon tae the toon an' took the doctor back tae the hoose ahin' 'im, but he cud niver gi'e a very clear statement o' fat wy he did it or fatna roads he took. I speert at the doctor 'imsel' hoo they managed it, but he pat it aff wi' a lauch, an' said, 'Yon wis a man an' a horse 'at cud dae onything.'"

"He's had mony a queer jaunt, the doctor," said the goodwife.

"Div ye see the time, Sandy?" said Andrew, holding up his watch.

"Efter ten! A'd nae idea o't. We'll be gyan."

"Gweed-nicht wi' ye, fowks."

"Lea' the inside door till ye see tae win oot," said the goodwife.

The outside door was opened, and a howling gust of wind entered and almost blew the light out. Sandy and Andrew went out into the storm, and the goodman barred the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

Fishing.

"IT'LL be a skirpie gin the morn, 'oman," said Peter Tam, as he closed the outside door and barred it, and followed his wife Meggie up the stairs to the garret to bed ; "it's gloomyin' ower terrible—great muckle doolders o' clouds."

This prospect delighted Peter, as having in its frown the promise of a two or three hours' fishing on the morrow.

"A hinna wull o't, an' my twa spleet new vrap-pers oot on the ropes," said Meggie.

"Ye nicht 'av' had as muckle wut's ta'en them in," remarked Peter.

"Ay, so A nicht ; but Is'bell Jott's been haudin' siccan a dundee aboot the gran' ane 'at she got hame. She's fairly been deavin' fowk aboot it ; an' she's tae be oot at 'er washin' in the back yard the morn's mornin'."

"Humph," said Peter.

"Haud ower a bit," he continued as he proceeded to lay himself down.

"Did ye hear fat the Souter's pig gya?" queried Meggie.

"No."

"Hoo had it been for wecht?"

"A've nae idea."

"Ise warrant Bell 'll hae a new floo'r in her bonnet on Sawbath."

Peter snored.

"Ye're weel aff," said Meggie, as she thought of the number of times the clock would strike before ever she "blin't an e'e."

Peter Tam was unquestionably the biggest liar in Braefoot. But he did not, be it remembered to his credit, lie to his neighbours' hurt. His lies were evident, and chiefly exaggerations of his own exploits, for if you believed him, he was a doer of great things. He had sporting proclivities, and many and marvellous were his reminiscences of wonders worked with the fishing-wand. Peter's education had stopped short of his being learned to read, but when he told you a lie, he would often aggravate it by telling you that he had "read it in the newspaper." His abnormal faculty for original swearing neutralised the disadvantages of a small vocabulary. Moreover, he was superstitious, and firmly believed in the corporeal existence of fairies.

By calling, he "wrocht a horse," which was a mare named Betty.

Peter once went into a grocer's shop, leaving Betty and the cart standing on the street.

"Let's see a pennyworth o'——" (here Betty started.)

"Stan', wo!" shouted Peter.

So the loons gloried in calling him "A penny's worth o' stan' wo."

One night in Macwhirter's shop, when the conversation had turned upon the subject of "cutting," Peter delivered himself of the following.

"A've deen a little at the scythe in my time, an' it niver gya me muckle trouble tae sneck doon an awcre or twa. A min' ance, oot owre at the watter side, A wis slashin' doon an awcre o' rye, an afore iver A noticed fat A wis daein—it's as fac's A'm here—A wis half through a bog o' saugh wan's."

"Weel, Peter," said Macwhirter, "ye are a great leear,"

"It's as fac's A'm here," maintained Peter.

That was Peter's style.

Peter's prognostication about the "skirpie gin the morn" was correct, for while the worthy couple slept it rained "hale watter." It was a wild, rough night, and in the pauses of the wind the "wauk-rife" could hear the roaring and rumbling of the

burns as they raced each other down through Braefoot towards the Swift.

About four o'clock in the morning, Peter wakened, jumped out of bed, put on his clothes and crept downstairs. He went to the door to look out. When he opened it, a wild whistle of wind shrieked round the corner of the house. In a terrible fright he closed the door with a bang, but in doing so he unwittingly pinned the tail of his coat therein.

"Oh, Meggie, Meggie!" he cried, "they hev me noo."

Meggie, roused by the noise, and missing Peter, cried, "Faur are ye, Peter?"

"Here, Meggie, Heist ye! heist ye! The fairies, Meggie! Pull me, pull me!"

Meggie rushed downstairs, and clutching hold of his outstretched hands bravely effected his rescue.

It was some hours afterwards that I met Peter accoutred with spade and "spunk" box on his way to a "midden" to "howk worms."

"Hullo! Peter, are you going to fish?"

"Ay. She'll fush the day or my name's nae Peter Tam. Will ye gyang wi's?"

"I'd like to."

"Surely, man. Ye needna tak' a rod wi' ye.

Ye can jeist cut a saugh wan', an' string them on as I throw them oot."

I accompanied Peter to the "midden," knowing well how the sight of a worm would work on his teeming imagination.

"Wo back, Betty," said Peter, as he caught hold of a retreating worm and stretched about six inches of it out of its hole. "Haud up the box. I took oot a seven pun' troot wi' the marrow o' that worm the day efter the last spate."

I smiled.

"It's as fac's A'm here," said Peter.

"That was a good trout," I remarked.

"A'd on a bigger ane than that tho' that samin day, but it wis wi' the fly. Did iver A tell ye about that ane?"

"No."

"Man," said Peter, "A wis fishin' at the moo o' the burn—it's as fac's A'm here. A wis nae time fan A hookit a fush; an' mighty! fat a monster! He ruggit by a' the earth like a mad stirk. It's as fac's A'm here see, if A hadna gotten a grip o' a breem bus' on the bank, A'd 'av' been intae the watter head foremost. My pirn wadna work at first, man, but fan ance A got it redd, mighty! if ye'd seen hoo it birl't. That fush, man, gaed doon the watter like lich'nin' for a quarter o' a mile

onywy ; syne he cam' back, an' gaed as far up the watter on the ither side o' me ; syne he stoppit, an' wi' ae swipe o' his tail, wis aff, a' my hook's an' twenty yairds o' my line—mair nor the half o't—tae the bargain. Man, A wis richt mad 'at A lost 'im. A saw three feet o' his tail abeen the watter."

I looked at Peter.

"It's as fac's A'm here," said he, "A cud let ye see the hook A took 'im wi'."

When the "spunk" box had its complement of bait, we started for the "moo o' the burn," Mac-whirter remarking as we passed his shop that "we'd better lea' ane or twa for a breed."

Contrary to Peter's advice, I took my fishing-wand with me. Peter's wand was home-made, straight and sturdy, and had a small windlass—a pirn, he called it—for a reel.

"That's a wan'ie, man," said he, holding it out before him, "'at A wadna gi'e for fifty o' yer shop anes. It's as soople's a threed. The aul' gamie 'at's dead an' gone noo ance offer't me fifteen shillin's for't. Ye'll nae min' on the aul' gamie. He wis afore your day. Man, he wis a queer ane. A ance saw 'im nail a sawmon an' a rabbit an' a flock o' pairtricks a' wi' ae shot."

"Never," said I.

"It's as fac's A'm here," said Peter, "he wis

firin' at a rabbit on the ither side o' the watter, an' jeist as he pull't the tricker, up jumpit a sawmon, an' he snappit it, syne the rabbit, an' syne a flock o' pairtricks 'at rose oot amon' the heather."

"That was a remarkable shot," said I.

"Ay," said Peter, "an' he ance shot a bird 'at there wis niver the like o' seen in this country. It's as fac's A'm here. Man, it had a feather 'at wad 'av' shaved a man."

"Did he sell the feathers for razors?"

"Na. He sell't it tae a mannie 'at wis clean daft about onything oot o' the ord'nar in that wy. That mannie, man, wad hae gi'en the loons a sax-pence for a butter deelee! He thocht naething at a' o' a common duke, but fan he cam' across a dukie wi' three legs or twa heads, man, he wad hae gi'en ony money for't."

Conversing in this entertaining manner we soon reached the "moo o' the burn."

"Have a dram, Peter, before you start?"

"No, thank ye."

"Tuts, man."

"Ou weel, gin A taste it, it'll be't a'."

When Peter had quaffed his dram he took a worm out of his pocket, for the majority of them had escaped from the "spunk" box, and baited his hook. Thinking the bait rather long, he bit

an inch off the end of it and spat it out. Then he "begood" to angle. I can see him now—a "drap" at his nose—firmly grasping his wand, and keenly watching the movements of his line.

"Ay, that's im'," he soliloquizes ; "he's at me. No, ay ; no, ay." (Pulls up his line with a jerk). "No, he's aff." (Drops in his line again). "Ay, he's at me again. Imphm. Tak' a haud noo, Betty." (Pulls up his line with a jerk). "Dod bather't, he's aff again. A some doot they're nae in the meed for takin' the day." (Drops in his line again). "Ay, here he goes again. A'll gie 'im time this twist. Imphm. He's aye there." (Pulls). "Aha ! he's on this time." (Winds away at the small windlass). "Come awa' noo, Betty. Fat a doolder !"

At this point Peter's slightly bent wand became suddenly straight—a circumstance which demands a slight break in the continuity of this sketch.

I left Peter busy invoking maledictions on the "fite-iron sowles" of the wary trout, and went further down the river. I had been gone about an hour when, hearing a tremendous "Hullo !" I looked up and saw Peter "wagging" frantically. I made my way towards him, and when within range of his voice—

"Michty!" said he, "fat'll A dae. A've hookit a monster o' a sawmon."

He was slowly winding at the small windlass, and the fish was moving steadily with the swirl of water out into the stream. When it reached the stream, birr! went the small windlass, and away went the fish. Slowly he brought it into still waters again. While working it up to a landing point he looked cautiously about him.

"Is there onybody seein's?" he asked.

"I see nobody," I replied.

"Fat deil wy'll A get 'im hame? He's about thirty pun."

"Land 'im first."

"Oh! A'll seen dae that. Come awa' noo, Betty. He's an awfu' monster. Michty! sic a feast's we'll hae. A'll sell the half o' 'im."

Gradually Peter worked it up, but it caught the swirl of the water and the stream again, and repeated its former tactics. In this way he "ran" it for about twenty minutes, and eventually landed it, a monster—bucket.

I must again closure Peter for a minute or two. His language was not such as would commend itself to any honest brother of the angle—in short, it was bad.

When he had calmed down a little, "A'll nae

fush anither ae cast," said he. Nor would he do it, so we fixed up our wands and returned home."

Next day Macwhirter, with a twinkle in his eye, remarked, "Stan' Wo tells me 'at he landit a monster o' a——"

"So he did," I interrupted.

"Peter's sic a leear," said Macwhirter, "A didna believe 'im."

CHAPTER XIV.

Strik'-me-dead.

"As sure as death,
Cut my breath,
Ten miles below the earth."

THUS Wangie Lowrie swore, while his right hand at his back was tightly closed on the missing "cheena" (china marble).

"Ye're hidin't at yer back, Wangie. I saw ye nip it," said three feet of a boy in knickerbockers.

"Ye're a big leear," roar'd Wangie.

By this time the rightful owner of the "cheena," "bubbling" freely as he went, had gone sixty yards towards telling his mother. He met little Elsie Lowrie.

"Fat's the maitter wi' ye?" asked the tiny maiden.

"Boo-hoo—your Wangie nipit my cheena."

"Eh," said little Elsie, who would have given three "mites" any day for a "cheena." "Eh, for whaten a lee."

As I turned away from this exhibition of precocious business talent on the part of the youth-

ful Lowries, I had a vision. Time sped back. Once again the old school stood at the top of the straight brae. It was dinner time. The bell was rung and the door shut, but I lingered at the back of the school gazing wistfully into the heart of the "minister's widdy." I knew that one of the trees there stood between me and Strik'-me-dead. Warily peeping from the back of a beech came his bonnetless head. Then he sprang out into full view and "waggit." I stood irresolute and excited. The tempter kept "wagging." "Tirr-a-wee, tirr-a-wee, proit tweet," sang a thrush in a neighbouring garden. I dashed off towards Strik'-me-dead, but imagining that I heard the school door open I right-about-wheeled, and was back past one of the windows in an instant. I had now crossed the Rubicon. I stood for a second at the door, then entered, and was just in time to shout "Here, sir." During that second at the school door I saw Strik'-me-dead's mother "watchin'" her "Jeamsy."

Time sped farther back.

In a humble tenement, beside a whitewashed hearth, in the ruddy and flickering light of a "flae-sack" fire, a widowed young mother sat dandling her only baby, a chubby wee boy, on her knee. How plainly her looks told the observant that she had been robbed of a great happiness. But she

was happy enough, or seemed to be so, as she bent o'er her infant boy, and sipped from his wee rosy lips the generous nectar of hope. I fancied I heard her speak. "Ou, my wee, wee mannike then—fat a great big fellow's ye are. Teetybo the feeties o't. Wait till ye growe tae be a man, ye'll work for yer mammie syne—ay wull ye. Ye're the best, best, bestest laddie in a' the warl'. Cockaleerie-lo. Gie yer mammie a kissie noo. I wull be richt prood o' you some day. Pussy, pussy, pussy. Bo—re a baggie. Seetle the bonnie wee cattie there. Tak' 'im, pussie. Pit the doggies tae the mill" (here she kept crossing the tiny pink legs one over the other)—

" Tak' a lick oot o' that wifie's pyock,
An' a lick oot o' that wifie's pyock,
An' ane fae the miller,
An' anither fae his man,
An' a lab oot o' the dam,

Syne gallopin', gallopin', gallopin' owre the hills an' hame again."

Alas! fond young mother. What of those dear early dreams? Once I stood for a second at the old school door and saw you "watchin'" your "Jeamsy."

Strik'-me-dead, when he told us a bigger lie than usual, always looked very solemn, wetted the tip of his forefinger, drew it across his throat, and said—

"Sure as death,
Cut my breath,
Ten miles below the earth."

Of course we believed him. If at any time we were slower of belief than was our wont, he would add, "Strik'-me-dead if it's a lee." That put the matter beyond question.

He made us eerie with graphic accounts of the daring exploits of a band of robbers who had their den in a cave up the Kirk burn. He spoke knowingly of bags of silver and gold, and mysteriously of trap-doors. For a handful of peas, if we had no locust beans, he would engage to show any of us the secret entrance to the cave. He dared not (so he explained as he enjoyed the edible part of the contract)—he dared not, on pain of being "cut up intae slices tae feed the bloodhounds," be seen approaching it by day, and the bravest amongst us was far from being stout enough of heart to accompany him at night. He smoked—when a roe hunt or some such chance occupation provided him with the "raise." There existed a wild story too that he had once been drunk. He knew all the birds' nests in the neighbourhood of Braefoot. But he was not a professional "herry-the-nest," although I have seen him hang a whole brood of gaping young blackbirds, all in a row, as a poulterer displays his goods, to the topmost wire

of a fence. He was an incorrigible "jook-the-school," but, as a rule, was always ready with a plausible excuse. One morning I remember he was unprepared. That same week he had been "howin' the tatties," "at the wud for sticks," and also "at the mull for a bag o' sawdust."

"James Coutts."

"Here, sir."

"Round here. Where were you yesterday afternoon?"

"Please, sir, A—A wis absent."

"Yes. Hold up your hand."

Strike-me-dead could take a "round dozen" any time, and a widespread grin to himself, as he squeezed the sting out of the thirteenth.

He had spent the afternoon in question "howkin' lucy-arnuts." Many and many a time his mother watched and followed him as he crawled off reluctantly to school.

"Noo, Jeamsy," she would say, "gyang intae yer skweel like a gweed laddie, an' dae yer mither's biddin'."

He would turn round, put his thumb to his nose, stretch his fingers out and tell her to "sook a berry." Then she would go to the wood for a burden of sticks to pay for the last window he had broken.

But one day Strike-me-dead was absent, both forenoon and afternoon. The master called his name twice each time, but there was no response. Nor did he appear the next morning. He had run away. At a convention at the school gable it was the unanimous finding that he had either joined the band of robbers up the burn or gone away to be a pirate.

Once again, but only once was Strike-me-dead seen on the streets of Braefoot.

Widow Coutts was distracted when she realised that her "Jeamsy" had actually run away. This feverish world is much the poorer for lack of the written lives of human beings like that humble widow. Her life had no great events in it, no adventure, no romance, but eternal beauty. It was never marred with rebellion or complaint. She worked in the fields, washed, scrubbed, or knitted to win herself a bare, plain livelihood and at night—every night—she talked, for the most part about her son, with God. "O Lord, watch owre my fatherless laddie, an' pit it intill's heart tae come back till's ain hame again," she would pray. She would accept of no charity: it would have been a reflection on her absent son. As the neighbours said she "kept hersel' tae hersel'," and they, knowing her and her sorrow, never spoke in

her presence of her "onnatral blagyaired o' a son." People are shy of meddling with that sorrow which one chooses to speak of to God only. Strik'-me-dead's mother lived day in, day out, keeping her sorrow green and her life beautiful.

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Twenty years with their ups and downs had come and gone when one day I was sitting alone in a railway carriage at the junction ten miles from Braefoot. The guard helped a sailor in beside me. I did not know him. One could readily see that what was immortal of him was soon to weigh anchor and pass forever from the shores of time.

"Tickets. Ye're for Braefit tae are ye? ay, ay," said the guard, and passed on to the adjoining compartment.

"Do you belong to Braefoot?" said the sailor, when the train had started.

"I do."

"Does Widow Coutts always live there?"

His voice trembled.

"Yes."

"In the same old house?"

"Yes."

He drew a heavy breath and for the next minute or two looked out at the carriage window.

"Do you know the —— family?" he continued.

"Yes, I'm one of them."

"Are you one of them? I'm Strik'-me-dead."

As the train rattled along he told me his story. It was the old one—the world, the flesh, and the devil. He had been round a large portion of the known world, and had come back to Braefoot with only five pounds odds, part of his last pay, in his pocket. It would keep him he said till he died, and bury him when he was dead. When we arrived at Braefoot, I helped him from the station to his mother's door, leaving him to enter his old home by himself. A few days after that I attended his funeral. His mother erected a small headstone in the churchyard—

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
DAVID COUTTS,
WHO DIED 14TH JANUARY, 18—,
AGED 29 YEARS;
ALSO,
HIS ONLY SON,
JAMES COUTTS,
WHO DIED 4TH JULY, 18—,
AGED 35 YEARS.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

I believe, although I cannot say it for certain, that the whole of the balance of "Strik'-me-dead's"

five pounds odds, after keeping him till he died, and burying him when dead, went towards the erection of the above simple stone to his own and his father's memory. Every fine Sabbath afternoon, Widow Coutts, dressed in her "blacks" and with a white handkerchief in her hand, was to be seen sitting beside those two graves; and the snowdrops, and the primroses, and the violets bloomed round them in their times. There is another grave there now. It is the grave of Widow Coutts, but you have to be told that, because she provided no room on the stone for any mention of herself.

CHAPTER XV.

The Destroyers of Life and Property.

THERE were certain hours of the day during which Braefoot was particularly quiet and well-behaved. At ten o'clock in the morning the school bell rang, and at the sound of it,

“Like fowls in a farmyard when barley is scattering,”

the children ran off hurriedly and reluctantly to their tasks—a striking contrast to the “joyous crowd” which once—only once—followed the wonderful music of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. From that hour until one o'clock, and then again from two o'clock until four, Donald M'Clew, the policeman, considered himself “orra.” Life was safe, property was secure. To while away those quiet hours, he always “daun'ert” into Macwhirter's, where he was generally to be found playing draughts and explaining how easily he could have won the game if he had only “played it richt.” “Div iver ye get a game oot amon' them at a', p'leece?” said Jeames Nicol, champion, one evening after he had beat him “a' tae sticks.”

The p'leece explained how easily he could have won the game he had just lost if he had only "played it richt."

But the day was not all draughts with M'Clew. There came a time when he had to be instant in the protection of life and property. At four o'clock in the afternoon the schools were "out," and the tone of society immediately sank to a low and dangerous level. Property was henceforth insecure. Cats were afraid to venture out of doors. Those who did so carried their lives in their paws. It was then that M'Clew might be said to have earned his wages. Complaints were freely lodged as he went his rounds.

"Hi! p'leeceman, jeist come here a meenit an' see this. A canna thole't ony langer. Ye maun pit a stop tae that veggybons o' loons playin' at their bools at the ga'le o' my hoose. Jeist look at that hole they've made in the wa' there. They wad seen ding the hale hoose doon in a rickle about my lugs. It's nae in the seed o' man tae pit up wi' the like o' that. My certy, if they're nae lookit some sharper efter, A'll see better intae fat the likes o' you's pey'd for. Fowk canna hae their property destroy't in sic a fashion."

"Maister M'Clew, wad ye speak tae me a meenit. Oor cat cam' intae the hoose last nicht

hirplin' upon three legs an' bleedin' something fearsome at the nose. Noo, the like o' that sudna be passed. Whaeveer had the hert tae dae sic a murdersome thing sud be ta'en up afore their betters an' severely remandit. A blame nae-body bit that ill-gettit veggybons o' loons. Ye'll really need tae mak' a sample o' some o' them, Maister M'Clew, for there's nae a cat in the toon 'at can get lived for them."

M'Clew inwardly resolved to punish the offenders, and would have done so but for one thing—his difficulty in getting into striking proximity.

I.

"First at the rowin' ring!"

"Secondy!"

"Thirdy!"

"In wi' yer mites."

"Nae peasies, Bulkie."

"Hi! Waddie, are ye gyan tae play?"

"Ay; here's my mite. Firsty."

"O, bit ye're ahin'."

"Len's a knut."

"Bore a line for a stance."

"Hing in, Tip. Ye're first."

"Ee—e—e, sic a fine rowie, Tip."

"Bulkie, go ahead; you're next."

"Dubs, by jingo."

"Slink, Bulkie."

"No A winna."

"Fire awa' then."

"Missed. Hoorah !"

"Dine't. Peety A didna slink."

"It's you noo, Parrot ; syne Waddie."

Parrot and Waddie "rowe."

"Hing in, Tip. It's you again, Slink."

"A' richt then. Fain. Fain everything, fain a'thing, fain upsies an' fain doonsies."

"O, bit I'd a'thing."

"Ye'd naething o' the kin', man."

"Fire awa'."

"Yon's 'is knut."

"'Tis not, man. Ye niver moved me."

"'Tis sot."

"'Tis not sot."

"Mites !" cries Wangie Lowrie as he rushes round the corner, "nips" the marbles, and runs off.

"Come back wi' that mites, man, ye dashed thing."

"Boo-hoo, gie's back my mite, see, Wangie Lowrie, or A'll gi'e ye on the stane wi' a nose."

"Stane 'im."

Wangie throws back the marbles.

"A new game."

"Firsty."

"Secondy."

"Thirdy."

"Gibbery this time."

"A' richt. In wi' yer mites."

"Michty! here's the bobby."

There is a stampede round the lane. When M'Clew looks after them he sees nobody, and very wisely recollects that he is not now so young as he once was.

II.

"A' them fat's gyan tae play at tackie, doon this wy."

"Ay, tackie ; come on."

"A'll be coonty—

Eetle, ottle,
Blue bottle,
Eetle, ottle, out—

Ye're oot."

"Hoorah ! A'm oot."

Eetle, ottle,
Blue bottle,
Eetle, ottle, out—

"Ye're oot."

"Hoorah ! A'm oot tae."

Eetle, ottle,
Blue bottle,
Eetle, ottle, out—

"Ye're oot. Weechy's tackie."

"A'm not tackie, man, for A wis eetle."

"Ye wis naething o' the kin', eetle. Ye wis ootle."

"Bit A wis eetle, man. Wisn't A, Jeckie?"

"Na, na, Weechy. Ye wis ootle richt enough. Ye're tackie."

"Bit A'll nae be tackie."

"Hame ye go, then," says the counter, giving him a push; "ye're aye hoaxin' the play."

"Watch fa ye're shovin'," clenching his fist.

"Wull A?"

"Ay wull ye."

"Hit 'im, Weechy."

"Ay wull A, in a dashed meenit," throwing off his jacket.

"Cleverest man spit owre that"

"Follow up wi' yer coortie, Weechy."

"That's his coortie."

"Did I say A wis gyan tae fecht?"

"Ho! ho! he's bet," cry the onlookers.

"A'm A tho'," says the counter, with his hands in his pockets; "A niver said A wis gyan tae fecht."

"Hauch, come on; there's nae tae be a fecht. Fa's gyan tae play at cock in the winda'?"

III.

Moonlight. A hubbub in a back street.

"Chapse me namerie."

"Chapse me guesserie."

"Hing in, then."

"Stan' tae, loons."

Namerie whispers into their ears.

"Come chise me oot, come chise me in tae the minister's gold watch."

"That's 'im."

"No ; my tail, Wangie."

"Come chise me oot, come chise me in tae the Pinner's donkey."

"That's 'im."

"Richt ! Peelack's tail, Boldie."

"Come chise me oot, come chise me in——
michty ! Fa's this."

"Hoo-oo-oo-oo !"

Off they scamper round the lane.

"Fa wis't ?"

"Wis't the bobby ?"

"Run doon, Boldie, tae the corner, and see if he's aye comin'."

"Come on wi's then."

"Hing in then."

"He ! he ! he !" cries Boldie, "sic a sook ; 'twis only Macwhirter. He's awa' up the slappie."

"I kent fine it wisna the bobby. I wisna a grain feart."

"Ye wis sot. Ye ran like the rest o's."

"Did A? Shut ye up or A'll seen close your moo, Spinnle."

"Wull ye?"

"Niver ound 'im, Spinnle. Wangie's aye for fechtin'. Come on doon tae Betty Shanks' winda."

Off they scamper again. Presently a wet finger is trying to rub a hole in Betty's window. Many and many a time has that sound brought Betty to the door in a raging fury, but she has now become accustomed and quite resigned to it. She merely cries, "Pussy, pussy, pussy," and gives a sigh of relief when her cat, her sole companion, leaps up purring on to her lap.

"Hauch, Betty's in her bed. Come on an' hae a rum'le at the Pinner's door."

Stones are gathered.

"Ready. Fire!"

The volley starts M'Clew from the shadow of houses.

"Michty! here's the bobby."

In a trice they vanish into their homes, slam the doors and bolt them, cringe into the remotest corners, and with quaking hearts tell lie upon lie to their parents.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Visit to Weelum Cushny's.

THE MACINNESES had had a tea party—one of the largest (there had never been many) ever known to have been given in Braefoot, and it had not yet ceased to be a “specilation” when Macwhirter, who had been at it, and I sallied forth one evening to pay a neighbourly visit to Weelum Cushny. Macwhirter opened the door, and observed—

“Is Weelum Cushny in?”

“We hae nae Weelum Cushny’s here,” said Beanie, his wife.

“Is Mr. Cushny in?” said I.

“Ay,” said Beanie, approaching the door, “come in.

Beanie met us in the passage.

“He’s ben a hoose,” said she. Then, with an emphasis on the “dask,” “wad ye come butt fae yer dask, Maister Cushny, an’ speak tae Sandy Macwhirter, the souter?”

“Sen’ ’im ben,” said Weelum.

Beanie motioned me into the kitchen.

"Wis ye at the pairty, Sandy?" said Beanie, as the souter made for Weelum's apartment.

"Ay."

"An' did they gi'e ye maister?"

"Ay."

"An' did ye tak' it?"

"Ay."

"Weel, surely ye may think muckle o' yersel'," said Beanie sarcastically.

Beanie Cushny was "upish." Her absorbing ambition had ever been to be the pioneer of social innovations, and anything of that nature which she had no hand in she denounced with a tongue which the neighbours said would "clip cloots," and which, Macwhirter once remarked, "wadna come muckle short o' parin' leather." Tradition had legs and arms of a story to the effect that Beanie, in her earlier days, on meeting a rival in the bonnet line on a quiet country road outside Braefoot, was so maddened by a glaring gumflower in the rival's bonnet, that she absolutely lost all control of her temper, with the result that the latent feud sped with marvellous rapidity from the tossing of heads to the wagging of tongues, and from the wagging of tongues to the trampling of bonnets on the turnpike. Knowing Beanie, I could believe it. It is still remembered that at the time of the bishop

sleeves, Beanie out-bishop-sleeved everybody in Braefoot. In Beanie's kitchen a little table stood in front of the little window that looked out into the front street. With a hand on each end of the table, peering out through the leaves of her "ger-anums" and "efuchsias," Beanie passed many valuable hours and made many observations.

"Dear me!" she would say to Weelum, as she gaped up and down the street as far as the four panes of glass in the little window would admit, "Yon's Janet Horn awa' by in full pitistatur. A won'er fat wy she manages tae get sic dress. It surely a' canna come in a richteous wy. Pete's puir ten shillin's a week canna haud fower gorbals o' loons gyan an' affoord the like o' that ony mair than it can flee in the fair air. Eh, Weelum? . . . Preserve us a'? Bell Howieson's awa' doon the toon at a yawfu' surrender. There's surely something adae. Jock'll be on the batter an' fechtin' again. It wad set 'im better tae haud less tae the ugly mou' o' 'im an' pey you for yer curlies. Ye'll niver finger a ha'penny o't, or A'm far cheatit. . . . That's Thowie's loon awa' hame fae the baker's wi' a penny bap anaith's oxter. Marget'll be gyan tae hae her efterneen. It's tea, tea, eternally wi' that wife. She's aye ca'in the cat aboot the kist. It's a miracle tae

mair than me 'at her digestion can stan't. It's nae secret 'at she keeps the trackie in the press, an' gyangs an' tak's a sook oot o' the stroop o't an' a bite o' a bap a' the time 'at she's workin' 'er wark about the hoose. Nae muckle won'er 'at Thowie's aye in sic poverty. Hoo wad ye like a good-wife like that, Weelum?"

Thus Beanie would stand at the little table by the window, and observe, and speculate, and appeal to Weelum. Weelum generally slept in his armchair by the ingle; but if he happened to be awake, he seldom troubled himself to give her an answer; and he got so into the habit of paying no heed to her questions, that when questioned by anybody else he would often fail to evince the slightest evidence of having heard.

"The mean vratch," said Chirsty Tiddler once; "A socht the len' o's box barra tae rowe oot my tatie dung, an' he niver sae muckle's let on 'at he heard me. Deaf! deil a deaf! he wisna wantin' tae hear."

I am confident that Chirsty did Weelum an injustice, and that his silence was the result of the habit I have alluded to.

"Ay," said Tibbie, as I seated myself in the kitchen and kindled my pipe to induce resignation, "it had been a mighty blawoot o' a pairty, I'se

warrant it. Bell Macwhirter's cheena wis at it, an' that wisna' a' the borra't finery. The hale toon wis hawkit, as A'm clear tae gi'e my aith, tae mak' as muckle a show as possible. The vera teapot wisna their ain. Their ane wisna gran' eneuch. But, my certes, had aul' Eppie Dingwall's head been abeen the grun', she wadna latten a teapot o' her's gyang stoorin' oot tea 'at wisna pey'd for on Meg MacInnes's table. Na, na ; she jeist mortally hatit fite-iron gentry. But the dother an' Meg's yawfu' chief. They're aye teain' back an' fore at ane anither on the sly. Heh ! pairties indeed ! Meg wad need it, weelawyte. They sudna gi'e pairties 'at hinna things o' their ain to gie them wi'. She borra't sax tea speens 'at A'm sure o', forbye a stan'y kin' o' a thing tae set the teapot on nae tae spile the tablecloth. Haith, min' ye, Meg wis daein' the thing in style. They tell me 'at the dishes wis a' washin' afore the fowk got their second cup o' tea. That's genteelity for ye ! A kenna fat the warl's comin' till. Some fowk 'll seen be owre prood tae sup twa moofu's wi' ae speen. But fat's puzzlin' mair nor me is—fa's gyan tae pey the piper ? It'll be a miracle if somebody's nae ta'en in wi't. I ken twa or three merchan's that had tae stop gi'ein' Meg things on tick afore noo. She's due the ane at the corner

something abeen three poun'; an' mair nor that, but fowk maun haud their tongue. . . . Meg has been haudin' an unco crawin' about it, but gin she say onything tae me, A'll nae be mealy mou't wi' 'er—A'll nae gyang ahin' 'er back tae tell 'er fat A think o't. Pairties indeed! an' her bairns hardly haein' a sark tae gyang on tae their backs. They didna think very muckle o' themsel's 'at gaed near han't. Janet Wabster wis there, an' efter 'a 'at Meg misca'd 'er tae. She's a mean low-lifed limmer, or she niver wad 'ave entered the door again. It jeist shows ye hoo little's in some fowk. Janet wisna genteel enech for Meg till she fell heir tae the puckly notes. It wis fae her 'at Meg borra't the cosy—a thing 'at A niver heard tell o' afore. They say it's for gyan on tae the teapot like a nichtmutch tae keep the tea warm. A heard the neebor's lauchin' about hoo Meg keepit it clockin' on the teapot on the bink owre near the fire an' scaum't it a'. It wis richt cheap on 'er. Fat wis she daein' wi' a cosy. She'd mair need o' a cosy tae keep hersel' warm, for ye'll nae get a waur pitten on horbe anaith the goon than Meg MacInnes in the hale parish. Fan she used to be comin' back an' fore tae me, I've seen' er mony a time get the len' o' a quyte or twa fan she'd been gyan awa' fae hame tae bide owre the nicht. She

needna be sae full on't. God knows, I wadna hae gane tae 'er pairty ; but Meg MacInnes has been mair behauden tae me than tae mony a ane 'at wis there. An' mair nor that, some o' the things 'at I've lent 'er hinna aye gotten their wy back again ; but fowk maun haud their tongue. . . . Meg's been gyan the length o' 'er tether this filie back, but it canna last lang at this rate. It's nae owre a week syne sin' a man wis tellin' me (but he bade me nae come owre't) 'at MacInnes wis jeist at the comin' doon again. It cudna be ither the wy 'at they've been carryin' on. Pairties indeed ! But fat'll they care. Nae ae preen pint. The mair 'at they can rob fowk the better. Meg ance cam' tae me wi' a fine fair face on, phrasin' an' butterin' me up tae the skies. She heard 'at we had sic gweed taties—'at there wisna the marraws o' them tae be gotten in the toon. She wad' tak' twa bushel o' them, they were sae gweed. She hadna ony change in the hoose, but she wad sen' ane o' the laddies fan they cam' hame fae the school tae get the change o' a poun', an' sen' 'im up wi' the price. The school's oot a year ago, but A hinna seen the price o' my taties yet. But deil speed her an' deil speed her again ! A mayna gi'e gran' pairties, but A've a speerit abeen daein' things o' that kin'. But fat could ye expec' ; her mither wis jeist sic

anither. Ou ay ; A ken a' the reet an' the rise o' Meg MacInnes, but fowk maun haud their tongue.

. . . Her father——"

"Are ye gyan ?" interrupted Macwhirter, putting his head in at the kitchen door.

"Yes. Good-night, Beanie."

"Gweed-nicht an' heist ye back. Ay, Sandy, an' they gae ye maister at the pairty."

"Gweed-nicht," said Sandy.

"Heh ?" sneered Beanie, as Macwhirter closed the outside door behind him.

"Ay," said Macwhirter when we were out on the street, "Weelum's gettin' up in the warl' wi's dask. Fat think ye wis he clerkin' on ?"

"I don't know," said I.

"Ou jeist a bit buirdie laid across twa bags o' taties."

CHAPTER XVII.

A Sabbath Morning with San'ers White.

SAN'ERS WHITE, and his wife Eppie, were "gweed livin' creaturs." A look at them both seated side by side in their pew at church, was a sermon in itself. San'ers' religion changed, beautified, and sweetened his life, and therefore differed from the religion of most others. "A won'er," said Tammas Winter, beadle and gravedigger, "at an aul' man like San'ers White, bathers his head sae muckle aboot religion." But to San'ers it was life. I have spent a Sabbath with him. We rose at six o'clock in the morning.

"Na," said San'ers, "A'm nae nane o' yer lang-lie-an-tea-breakfast fowk. A dinna believe in't. I rise at sax o'clock ilka mornin', an' the best o' the Lord's day's as precious tae me as the best o' any ither day in the week, an' mair sae."

The big Bible was brought to the kitchen from the top of the chest of drawers in the room, and laid down on the table before San'ers, and by the time that Eppie had the fire kindled and the "biler" on, San'ers was ready to lead in the wor-

ship of God. 'Twas a simple heartening service, such as I think God would listen to and be pleased with. Then the cow was milked; and San'ers "pat her oot tae the girse" while Eppie busied herself with the breakfast. San'ers' "girse" was away up the brae beyond the manse glebe, and I went along with him for the sake of the walk, and his company. Of course I dallied at the top of the brae. To stand there on a beautiful Sabbath morning in the green summer-time, and look down upon the humble tenements of Braefoot, was a pleasure to be often and freely indulged in. The sweetening influence of the pretty pastoral sight, so full of Sabbath rest, found it's way and a kindly welcome into the soul. The yellow light of the morning sun, streaming over the ridge of Ben Alder, gifted the snug little picture with that heavenly charm, which bids crushed and feeble-winged thought arise and beat upward with the vigour and appreciation of the laverock. At the foot of the brae lay the tenements, wisely built as far as possible from the oft-times turbulent Swift. The gardens were crowded with trees—apple, cherry, and pear; and there was generally in each, in some favourite corner, some favourite bush—sweet-brier or lilac. From the Square with its three towering poplars, the village church, with its

slated roof, rose conspicuous, and seemed to preside with quiet dignity over the heather and straw-thatched tenements. Beyond the tenements lay the fields, and beyond these again, by the foot of Ben Alder, the Swift sang its everlasting song.

I leaned on the fence to enjoy this charming picture. Jean Forrester's back door was open, and I heard the following dialogue :—

Jean—"Jock, come awa' in tae yer porritch an' yer carritches."

Jock (who was herding his rabbit on the greenie)—"A can say my carritches, an' A divna get porritch on Sundays?"

Out through the open door wheeled the reeking "spurkle," missed Jock, and struck the paling which enclosed Jean's garden. A Spanish cock cried "chuck, chuck, chuck," and three or four hens of his breed, made their feet their friends, and "clawed" the "spurkle." Jean appeared at the door and made for Jock, who bolted over a bed of carrots, round a rosebush and into the house. Jean followed in hot haste.

Jean—"A'll learn ye my man (thump, thump, and yells) tae gi'e yer grannie back-chat."

Jock—"Neyther A div get porritch on Sundays then."

Jean—"Deil speed (thump, thump, and yells)

the hungry belly o' ye. Mony a ane wad be gled tae get them. Tak' yer porritch there this meenit."

Jock—"They're caul'."

Jean—"They're naething o' the kin', caul', ye leein' scoonrel. Tell ye me 'at they're caul'."

Jock—"Ye hinna gi'en them saut."

Jean—"Saut! A'll saut ye." (thump, thump, and yells).

Jock—"They're knotty."

Jean—"Knots here, knots there, A'm determined A'll gar ye sup ilka pick o' them. An' jeist for your impidence this Lord's day mornin', besides yer carritches, A'll gar ye learn up twa chapters o' the Bible, an' say them baith 'ithoot a stammer afore ye pit a fit oot owre the door this day."

The door closed, and I could then hear a choir of laverocks, raining a flood of silvery music from the skies, and it seemed to me as I listened as if Heaven's eternal music had overflown the walls of jasper.

Jock Forrester was the boy, who, on being questioned by Mr. Black, said that the three persons in the Godhead were the Father, the Son, and the Holy *Goat*.

On looking round I found that San'ers had left me a considerable distance behind, so I hurried

on, and overtook him just in time to drive in the tether-stick. On our way home we saw the minister taking his morning walk round the glebe. A smile romped about the corners of San'er's mouth when he noticed him.

"Did ye hear aboot the depitation?" said he.

"No, what deputation?"

"Ou the depitation o' elders 'at gaed up tae the minister tae gi'e 'im's kail throwe the reek for lauchin' in the middle o' 'is sermon last Sabbath nicht. A' the elders bit mysel' gaed up tae 'im in a body aboot it. It's said that fan they were half-wy up the manse avenue their herts fail'd them, an' that they wad 'ave turned back again if it hadna been 'at the minister's man had gotten a glimpse o' them by that time. They were a' ta'en intae the parlour; an' the minister, fan he learned fat they were on, took wi' 'is faut at ance, an' explained tae them hoo it happened. Fat think ye wis the 'casion o' his lapse?"

"I don't know."

"Ou, a buck o' a chiel wi' a terrible bus o' a red head had been sittin' in the front of the gallery; an' a little nickum o' a loon 'at wis sittin' in the seat ahin' 'im, keepit on pittin' ane o' 'is fingers in amon' the chiel's hair, an' takin't oot again, an' layin't doon on the book-brod, an' hemmerin' awa'

at it wi' 'is ither han', an' wi' a' 'is nicht, jeist, by a' the earth, like a blacksmith. Fan this was explained to the depitaton, Dauvit Guthrie, fa wis the hardest on the minister for his onseemly conduct', lauched like tae split 'imself', an' said he wad 'ave likit richt weel till 'ave seen the birkie."

When we arrived at the house porridge was waiting.

"Ah! man," said San'ers, as he drew his tongue up the back of his spoon, "there's naething like a plate o' porritch for ye. A plashach o' tea an' loaf till't disna say bizz till a man body. There's naething at'll stick tae yer ribs like the porritch. A dinna believe in owre particular cookery. I aye haud by the gweed plain diet. Porritch is gran' eneuch, an' suffeicient eneuch for the best o's; but ye'll get fowk at'll turn up their noses at it—stoopid, pridefu' haniefu's o' creaturs."

After breakfast we dressed ourselves for the kirk. This was an interesting ceremony.

"Lat's see a skyte watter fae ye, 'oman," said San'ers to Eppie, "till A get a sweel."

San'ers "sweel" was a veritable storm of wind and water, for when washing his face he blew like a whale. His "clean things" were toasting by the fire, and when he came to put on his stockings—

"Gor man," said he, addressing me, "A've a richt sair tae."

"Is't a corn?" said Eppie.

"Na sang't," replied San'ers.

"Lat's see't," said Eppie, taking hold of San'ers' big toe.

"O—h!" roared San'ers, "lat me alane, Elspeth Getherer."

Then there was the extreme trial of putting on a collar. San'ers "thole't" a collar on Sabbath.

"Bather that collar," said he. "A'd far rather stan' a yokin' at the ploo than pit it on."

"Hoot na," said Eppie.

"Try ye't then, an' see fat ye can mak' o't," said San'ers.

Eppie tried.

"Alis!" cried San'ers, "hae a care fat ye're about 'oman. Feich! tak' yer knockles oot o' that or ye'll be throwe my thrapple."

"Hoot oot, man," said Eppie, "haud yer tongue. It's a' owre noo."

Dressing over, San'ers took the Bible again, and searched it until he heard the first "tang" of the bell. Then we started for the kirk. The bell was cracked, and, on the way, I remembered how to our youthful ears it used to say something like—

Don't come—bide.

Don't come—bide.

Bide, bide,

Don't come—bide.

Tammas Winter, beadle and gravedigger, used to stand three or four yards on to the street, and tug away at the bell, while he exchanged the "uncos" with the people from the country. The bell and he often dropped into dialogue :

Don't come—bide.

"Hoo's a', Burnmoo?"

Don't come—bide.

"Are ye a' weel, Mains?"

Bide—bide.

"Awfu' time o' drocht."

Don't come—bide.

"Are the neeps a' doon."

Sometimes he bestowed a ring of the bell upon "Daft" Jock. Poor Jock! how it pleased him! In wearing out a deep groove in the freestone base of the belfry, the chain to which the bell rope was attached had worn itself done, and one morning while Jock was enjoying a ring, it gave way, landing him full on his back in the middle of the street. Jock rose and fled home to his mother.

"Fat's the maitter wi' ye, Jock?" said an old woman who met him on the way.

"A've pu - pu - pu - pull't doon the kirk——
b-b-b-b——"

"The kirk!" exclaimed the old woman, "Gweed
be aboot me, Jock."

On arriving at the kirk, San'ers and I stood speaking to several of the groups which had congregated round the door, until Tammas Winter had finished the ringing in; then we followed Eppie inside, where, for the next two hours, Mr. Black, in his own kindly way, earnestly endeavoured to lift our thoughts and affections out of the narrow sphere of things seen and temporal, into the great infinity of things unseen and enduring.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At the School.

THE Parish School of Braefoot stood at the top of the straight brae. Strawberries grow there now. The manse was close by, but you could not see it for the trees. Mr. Bright, the schoolmaster, was a scholar, and a particular cronie of the minister's. He was not quite such a great man as Mr. Black, but he came next. When we met Mr. Black we pulled off our bonnets. When we met Mr. Bright it never occurred to us to do that. But then we seldom met Mr. Bright, for whenever we saw him we ran. I have often wondered why. Frequently the two would be found in the summer-house at the foot of the manse garden discussing horticulture, or it might be Homer. They smoked, using clay pipes—snowy clay pipes with long stalks, as became their rank. The minister was an enthusiastic gardener. He had always rhubarb long before anybody else. He was great on the medicinal qualities of rhubarb. "Roobrub," the minister's man called it, and in speaking of it to the

villagers he wandered often and grievously from the truth.

"A cut doon a stake o't," he once said in Macwhirter's shop, "'at sair't the manse for a fortnicht."

"Ay, A heard the crash o't," said Macwhirter.

But his apple trees were the minister's favourites. He digged round and duned them, propped and pruned them with the tenderest care. We liked the minister, but that did not hinder us from making occasional raids on his garden. It was through him that we got a half holiday on brose-day. It was the minister who handed us the prizes on the "jimation day." And more than once the excitement of a fortnight has culminated in his calling at the school and taking us all down to the market green to see a menagerie.

Mr. Bright kept boarders. They played at hide and seek about the manse, and their resounding "cuckoo" was gall and wormwood to the minister's man. He once broke the handle of a garden rake over the shoulders of one of them, and times without number they were the cause of his breaking the third commandment. But to do him justice, he would sometimes extend the right hand of fellowship. He would say—"Loon, if ye'll gyang up an' turn yon sheep, A'll lat you see o' a sklyterpike's nest."

But what the "sklyterpike" was, or where it nested, he never divulged. He used to tell us, too, about a gun of his which he "ramdambled wi' American spice," and with which he engaged in the novel sport of shooting "dead craws."

Mr. Bright delighted in his boarders. He rose early in the morning with them and took them away to the breezy uplands, and gave them an hour's drilling in their lessons. Then he raced them back again to the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse was close beside the school, and whenever one of his scholars did particularly well, he sent him into the kitchen to Miss Bright, who gave him a "jeely piece," the reward of merit, and set him down on the front door-step to eat it. The "jeely piece" was a coveted distinction.

We once, quite unintentionally, wounded Miss Bright's feelings. One morning the bell had been rung at the usual hour, and we were all assembled in school. There was, however, no appearance of the master. One of the boys went behind his desk, and began to personate him.

"Silence!" said he, but hearing a movement at the school door, he vanished in an instant.

The door opened, and in came Miss Bright. She went up to the master's desk and said—

"As Mr. Bright has suddenly become very unwell this morning, there will be no sch—"

"Hooray ! hooray ! hooray !" we shouted, not allowing her to finish.

Miss Bright grew exceedingly red in the face.

The bell was always rung at ten o'clock in the morning ; but the majority of us were generally on the play ground about nine. Chevy was our standard game. It was at chevy that Strike-me-dead, by way of settling a disputed point, blackened Sharger's eye. Sharger ran home, and was absent from the school that day. His mother came to our house in the evening to get my evidence. I began to explain to her what I saw, but she stopped me.

"It's nae fat ye saw. A'm nae carin' fat ye saw. It's yer evidence 'at A'm wantin'."

I told her what I saw. Next day she came to the master about it. I remember seeing her pass the school window, dragging the frightened Sharger behind her. She knocked at the door. The master opened it.

"This is my Johnnie, Mr. Bright," said she. "He wis sent hame fae the school yesterday wi' his e'e as black as a weel-polished boot." The master went out and closed the door, and we all looked at Strike-me-dead. He was biting his lip. At the

"five meenits" Strike-me-dead was kept in, and when we came back into school again after a hurried round at chevy, we noticed that his face was cleaner-like round about the eyes. The bell! what a stern interruption the bell was! It was the voice in the garden of Eden saying, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." It was the death-knell of the careless, thoughtless, buoyant spirit that thrilled us to the finger tips at chevy. After the bell came the prayer, then the register.

"James Philipson."

"Here, sir."

"David Guthrie."

"Here, sir."

"Round here. Where were you yesterday?"

"I was nott (required) at home."

In the school the master consistently ignored all provincialisms.

"Where were you?"

"At home."

"You have just told me you were not at home."

The little paragram was altogether beyond David.

"Hold up your hand." (Whack! whack!)

"Thomas Mortimer."

"Here, sir."

"Alexander Robertson."

"I."

"Round here."

No response.

"Alexander Robertson, round here."

No response.

Alick had taken fright and was "greetin'." He was punished for his misconduct. The little fellow had been spelling over a word to his big brother, and he was just on the point of uttering the letter "i" when the master called his name, so he shouted out "I" instead of "Here, sir." His big brother might have explained but he didn't, and so to Alexander Robertson, for all too long a space, the joy went out of life. The day's work began with the Bible and the catechism. We read after this fashion:—

"And all—the days of——"

"Spell it."

"M e t h u s e l a h—Methooslum."

"Methuselah, you dunderhead."

"Methuselah were—nine hundred sixty—and nine years and—he died."

One morning a new scholar introduced us to a novel way of minding our stops. He ticked out his pauses like a clock, giving one tick for a comma, and rising by a tick at a time till he reached four ticks for a full stop.

"And he (Balaam) took up his parable (tick) and said (tick) Balaam the son of Beor hath said (tick) and the man whose eyes are opened hath said (tick, tick, tick)."

What I remember most distinctly in connection with the catechism is the stinging sensation which accompanied what the master called a "round half-dozen." Effectual calling, the *pons asinorum* of the catechism, was our greatest staggerer.

"What is effectual calling?"

"'Fectual calling is the work of God's spirit"—

We could all reach that point. Some of us could even get the length of "whereby," but few of us ever crossed the bridge, although on the other side stood Miss Bright ready to bestow the reward of merit.

When the "big loons" were up at their Latin, affording Mr. Bright many opportunities for physical exercise, we lesser boys were busy at our copies writing, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," or some such appropriate precept. Young as we were such precepts inspired us, for I remember that during the writing lesson we were always exceedingly busy—whirling totums under the desk, or religiously pursuing some other equally intellectual occupa-

tion. Once during writing time Thomas Mortimer jumped up off his seat and cried, "Oh! Oh!"

"Round here," said the master. "Hold up your hand."

"Please, sir, James Phillipson dobbit me."

"Hold up your hand." (Whack! whack!)
"Go behind the blackboard." Tom went behind the blackboard, took his "skailey" and drew a "mannie" with a long nose on his slate, and wrote underneath it "Dominie." Then he exhibited his work of art to those who could see it, gave it a "round half dozen" on the nose, made faces at it, and finally spat upon and wiped it out of existence. Revenge is sweet.

We liked the afternoon best. By that time the half of the day was over. Soon we would hear the welcome words, "Books and slates all past." It was in the afternoon that we were taught history.

"Can any of you tell me," said the master one afternoon, "in what kind of a tree it was that Charles II. hid himself from Cromwell's redcoats?"

John Tolmie cracked his fingers. John was the boy who hated the Sabbath day above every other day in the week, because he was kept in all the afternoon to read the Bible.

"Well?" said the master.

"Sickimore," answered John.

"Foot," said the master.

Strike-me-dead's neighbour whispered something, and crack, crack, crack, went Strike-me-dead's fingers.

"Well?" said the master.

"The tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon the pain of death," answered Strike-me-dead.

"Hold up your hand, you blockhead. (whack ! whack ! whack !) Foot."

Court-martials were held in the afternoon. I remember a serious one. The minister's favourite apple tree had been plundered the previous night.

"Books and slates all past," said the master. Then he pronounced the benediction, and let the girls go. "Boys," he began, "I have to speak to you. One of you went into the minister's garden last night, and completely robbed one of his apple trees. Now, which of you did it?"

There was no answer.

"Will the boy who did it step round to the floor?"

No movement.

"I will give you three minutes."

At the end of what seemed like half-an-hour nobody had risen. Then he preached to us, saying in conclusion, "The footprints are still

visible in the garden and will be carefully measured so that the thief will assuredly be found out and duly and richly rewarded for his evil deeds."

We never heard anything further about the matter. No shoes could be got to fit the prints in the garden save the minister's own. That did not surprise those of us who knew that the raider while helping himself to the apples wore a pair of Mr. Black's old shoes, which he had rescued from a heap of rubbish for the purpose. With Mr. Black and Mr. Bright books and slates are all past long ago. To all of us who knew them they are pleasant memories. To some of us they are indeed much more.

CHAPTER XIX.

Exit Johnnie Clapperton.

NOT long ago I lounged upon the banks of a little burn, which, in derision of mills in general and sawmills in particular, seemed to say—

“ Mills may come and mills may go,
But I go on for ever.”

It was the same little burn which in the old days used to drive the rickety water-wheel of Johnnie Clapperton's rickety sawmill. Only in the glimmering landscape of memory, away towards the morning skyline, is the old mill to be seen now-a-days. I seem, as I write, to be viewing it from off the green brae above the mill-dam, where in the spring time we used to gather pinks and anemones. The dam is a beautiful inverted water-colour of everything around and above it. Suddenly the sluice is raised with a couple of jerks, the waters rush forth like hounds from the leash, the wheel starts round and quickens its pace, and I can hear above the plashing of the waters the din of the whirring saw as it tears its way through a fir leviathan. As quickly the sluice is dropt, wavelets chase

each other backwards along the surface of the dam, blurring the picture, the waters sink in the "spoots," the wheel slackens its pace, the whirring saw rings out, and once again all is silent.

Johnnie dwelt beside the mill. His cottage was a long, low, thatched one, with a little garden in front of it. Its walls were kept as white as the drifted snow, and in the summer evenings, when the setting sun lit fires in its little windows and turned the green of its moss-covered thatch into gold, it made the passing artist stand and admire.

The mill was a favourite spot with the loons of Braefoot. It was to Johnnie's dam that they went in the summer time—generally three times a day—to dook, and there, with the questionable aid of bungs and bladders, many a good swimmer learned the A B C of the manly art. I remember how thoroughly some of the loons used to enjoy those dooks, diving into the deepest part of the dam from off the sluice; how some of them dooked but did not enjoy it at all, not having courage enough to put off the "caul' glaff;" how all of them, without exception, enjoyed the ever-comforting "chatterry-piece." It was in Johnnie's dam that they sailed their ships carved from the bark of the fir tree, and it was there too—I am now discovering a secret—that Betty Shanks' white cat ultimately

met its death by drowning. It was in Johnnie's "tail-race" that Strike-me-dead once "spulked" an eel three feet nine inches long, at least so he said. Johnnie Clapperton's dust lies in the little churchyard just over the burn from the spot where the saw-mill used to stand. His modest grave-stone is a remarkable one. For truth it puts most of its scripture-quoting brethren to the blush. One without the slightest scruple can believe every word of the inscription—

JOHN CLAPPERTON

Born 6th February, 18— ; Died 10th April, 18— ;
Aged 60 Years.

Johnnie was predeceased by "Gizzie," his wife, and survived by Margaret his only daughter. Gizzie's last words to Margaret were—"Noo, Maggie, keep yer father ticht (short of money.) He'll only hae you to look efter 'im noo. Bide wi' 'im as lang as he lives, an' try, wi' Gweed's help, tae wile 'im fae the drink. Puir Johnnie, he'll gyang oot o' the reel wi' baith feet fan A'm awa'."

Gizzie was carried over the burn, and Johnnie, all too faithfully lived up to her prediction.

Johnnie's complaint was a chronic dryness in the throat, for which he blamed the sawdust. The only thing that did him any good was the frequent

consumption of "donals." He often went for the sake of his health to the Harrow Inn. Johnnie used to cart props to a neighbouring seaport for shipment. When very "ticht," he has been known to toss Simon, his horse, out of a feed of corn. When the wayside public-house was sighted—"Noo, Simon, heads or tails. Heads a donal, tails a feed o' corn." Simon was never known to win the toss.

One night Johnnie had been at the Harrow Inn for his health, and this is the story I have to tell. He was staggering badly as he made his way up the side of the burn to the mill cottage. For the last two hours he had been setting himself up as a champion saw-sharper. For the last two hours M'Robbie, a brother in trade, had been knocking him down. He was fighting the wordy war over again as he rolled homewards, clinching his points with strong language. Suddenly he stumbled and fell, and swore. Then rousing himself into a sitting posture, "A needna swear," said he; "A wis gyan tae sit doon onywy." There he sat and babbled to the burn.

"Johnnie Clapperton's the boy. Tell *me* 'at he canna sharp a saw! There's nae a sawmiller livin' 'at can sharp a saw if Johnnie Clapperton canna dae't. Look here see! A'll wadger a twenty

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poun' note 'at Johnnie Clapperton 'll sharp a saw wi' ony man in broad Scotlan'. M'Robbie sharp a saw! He niver sharped a saw in's life. M'Robbie canna sharp a saw! Look here see! Johnnie Clapperton's the boy tae sharp a saw. Tell *me* 'at Johnnie Clapperton canna sharp a saw. Owre forty year at the job, an' canna sharp a saw! Look here see! Twenty poun's the wadger twenty poun'! ony man in broad Scotlan' twenty poun'! Look here see! Johnnie Clapperton—"

Let him babble.

Inside the mill cottage sat Margaret, and Willie Johnstone. They were sweethearts—had been so for years. Margaret had promised to be Willie's wife some day. Willie had been forbidden the cottage by Johnnie, who considered him "nae man at a'." Willie, poor fellow, lacked the manly accomplishments of swearing and "stan'in' his han'." Johnnie encouraged the visits of Rob Scott, a carter, who could swear and stand his hand with the best. But love such as Willie's laughs heartier the greater the difficulties that stand in its way, and many a happy evening he spent with Margaret in spite of Johnnie's ban. I do not care to contemplate what life would have been to Margaret without such a love. While her

father would have been at the Harrow Inn for his health, Willie would have kept her company in the cottage, or they would have walked together beneath the silver birch trees up the burn.

Willie often alluded to her promise to become his wife, and sometimes went the length of wondering when she would fulfil it, but on these latter occasions Margaret would grow sorrowful and abstracted. On the evening of which I write, he had been wondering more particularly, for this was the end of their conversation—

“Na, Willie,” said Margaret, “A canna lea’ my father yet. Ye ken it was my mither’s last words ’at A wis tae bide wi’ ’im as lang as he lived, an’ try wi’ God’s help tae wile ’im fae the drink.”

“Weel, Maggie, it’s too bad,” said Willie; “but ye’re worth waitin’ for.”

Willie took his leave in his customary way, knowing that Johnnie would soon be staggering in.

He had not gone far when he heard a splash as of something falling into the dam. He hurried back, but as the night was dark, he saw nothing there but the reflected stars. He listened, but all was silent. Then there seemed to be a slight disturbance in the water somewhere. He rushed into the cottage for a lantern, and came out, followed

by Margaret. With the aid of the lantern they discovered a cap floating on the water near the sluice.

"O! my father," cried Margaret.

Willie waded in up to the chin, and coming against some yielding obstacle with his foot, bent under the water and lifted up—the body of Johnnie Clapperton.

He carried his burden into the cottage and laid it on the floor. It was motionless as a set mill. The doctor was quickly on the spot, but not before the spirit of Johnnie Clapperton had put off for ever from the shores of time.

The gravedigger, a cronie of Johnnie's, regarded the sad occurrence in the light of a personal bereavement. He confided in Macwhirter.

"Puir Johnnie," said he, "A wad raither hae beeriet ony ither three."

"Aye grumlin'," replied Macwhirter.

A few months afterwards, the gossips talked nine days about the quietest marriage ever known to have been celebrated in Braefoot.

CHAPTER XX.

How Rob MacLaggan and Geordie Macintaggart came by their Limps.

ROB MACLAGGAN and Geordie Macintaggart were fast friends. They had been companions when they were Skellach and Golly Michie at the school up the brae. Skellach was so nicknamed from the thin, screeching nature of his voice, while an early habit of taking the name of God Almighty in vain, together with a backwardness in the matter of pronunciation, were responsible for the sobriquet of Golly Michie. Of the many things which these two had in common I am not in the meantime to speak—only of the limps. They walked in what was known as the dot-and-carry-one style, and a view of them marching together was, to those who had a taste in that direction, something above the average in the minor poetry of motion.

“They’ve had a wheen ups an’ doons in their time,” remarked Macwhirter, and, literally speaking, it was a good enough observation.

Skellach acquired his limp in the way hereinafter faithfully set down. It was one sweet morning in

the month of May. What time the laverocks from their vantage ground in the wide bend of heaven warned the young reivers of Braefoot after this fashion—

“ Wee, wee, wee, wee,
Look at my eggies, but let them be,
Or else ye’ll be hanged on a high, high tree,
Or drowned in the deep, deep sea.

It was drawing nigh unto ten o’clock—school time. Skellach and Golly Michie were skulking about from tree to tree and from bush to bush in the minister’s “widdy.” Having birds’ eggs in their pockets, they moved about with extreme caution

“A’m gyan tae sit doon an’ blaw mine noo,” said Skellach.

“So am I,” said Golly Michie.

“I’ve forty-five on my string at hame,” continued Golly, “an’ this ten mak’s mair nor fifty.”

“Bit I’d like tae hae a hunner,” said Skellach.

Skellach had put a pin through both ends of a cushat’s egg, and with wide-opened eyes and bulging cheeks, was in the act of blowing it when they heard a voice.

“Boys,” said Mr. Black, the minister, looking over the wall of the manse garden, which adjoined the wood.

“The boys, O, where were they?”

Mr. Black indulged in a quiet smile at the patness of his little parody.

They were recovering their breath at the edge of the wood.

"Gyeed gyad," said Golly Michie, turning out his jacket pocket and up his nose. He had rolled over and over for several yards down a bank in the course of his sudden flight from the minister.

Skellach was taken with a violent fit of coughing and a spitting of egg shells.

A magpie started overhead.

"Hooray! a piet's nest, A bet ye," cried Golly. "Up ye go, Skelly." Neither of them had a magpie's egg in their collection.

Having rid his throat of the shells of the cushat's egg, and divested himself of his jacket, the brand-new rents in which would yet cost him many tears, Skellach immediately put himself under way for the fir tree-top out of which the magpie had flown. He could give the most of his contemporaries points at climbing a tree, and was soon sitting on the topmost branch looking into the magpie's nest, which contained no fewer than seven beautiful, pale bluish-white, spotted eggs.

What a supreme moment for a boy is that in which, after a difficult and hazardous spell of climbing, he has found a nest at the top of some

tall forest tree. With the summer sky above him and airily rocking on the gentle jabble of green tree-tops, he drinks of a joy which in the after years of his battle with the world his jaded soul will thirst for—oh ! so eagerly.

But Skellach was not suffered to raised the cup of this rare vintage to his lips.

“Onything in’t ?” cried Golly.

“No, it’s only biggin’,” replied Skellach.

“Nae lees noo, Skelly. A ken ye fine.”

“As sure as death.”

“There’s eggs in’t, man. A ken by ye.”

“A’ richt then ; dinna believe me,” said Skellach.

The school bell rang. Skellach slid, swung, and tumbled down the tree, and in the twinkling of an eye they were both hurrying as fast as their legs could carry them to school.

“Fat’s efter ‘no mere man since the fall,’ Golly?”

“‘Lost communion with God,’” said Golly. ‘A divna min’ the rest.”

“We’re in for’t the day then.”

“Fat chapter is’t ?”

“A divna min’.”

“Hev ye ony fiddle roset ?”

“No.”

“Michty.”

They were soon seated at their desks in school,

and from the windows drawn to admit the fresh air there issued a drowsy noise as of a myriad bees busy in a lime tree in the height of the honey harvest.

The tasks for the day proceeded.

Skellach and Golly Michie were invariably "tail." They had thus much more spare time than those who were really in earnest about education. Skellach busied himself in plotting and planning how he could best manage to get to the magpie's nest unknown to Golly Michie, while that diligent student had already in sweet imagination stolen a march upon Skellach. He had hurried back from dinner, climbed the fir tree, hidden the magpie's eggs, and was innocently enjoying a game at "chivy" before Skellach had returned to the playground. During the occasional sudden and perfect stillness produced by a sharp stroke of Mr. Bright's cane on the desk, Skellach and Golly Michie could hear the laverock singing as he fluttered far away up in the blue lift over the manse glebe; they could hear the "pink, pink, pink" of the merry chaffinch in the trees at the back of the school; while from the juniper bushes in the minister's "widdy" came the loud piercing shrieks of the startled blackbird.

This was almost more than they could endure.

Skellach filled his mouth with stumps of lead pencils lest he should be tempted into whistling back the melancholy "peep peep" of the bullfinch.

They had been little over an hour in school when Skellach went up and addressed Mr. Bright :

"If you please, sir, may I get out?"

Mr. Bright jerked his head towards the door, and Skellach went out.

Golly Michie's suspicions were at once aroused. Next minute he went up to Mr. Bright—

"If you please, sir, may I get out?"

Mr. Bright, without noticing who addressed him, again jerked his head doorwards.

Golly was just outside in time to see Skellach disappearing at full speed into the minister's "widdy" in the direction of the magpie's nest. He started in hot pursuit. Skellach had landed at the tree, and had almost climbed out of reach when Golly overtook him and caught him by the foot.

"Will ye gie's hawvers?" said Golly.

"A tell't ye there wis naething in't," replied Skellach.

"Doon ye come, then," said Golly, giving Skellach a vigorous pull. Skellach fell heavily on the slope, rolled down the bank, and lay moaning.

"Skellach," cried Golly Michie, but he got no answer.

Golly Michie, white with fear, ran home to tell Skellach's mother. He cried in at the door, "Robbie's fa'n doon aff a tree an' kill't 'issel'."

When Mistress Maclaggan arrived at the wood, Skellach had somewhat recovered. He was carried home, and attended to by the doctor, who found on examination that his left leg had been broken.

That night Golly Michie, wishing to do all that he possibly could for his companion, went to the druggist's and asked for "a pennyworth o' stuff for pittin' on tae yer oot o' the jint."

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A far other and more important prize than a magpie's egg was to be won when Geordie Macintaggart came by the accident which decreed that he also must run what of the race of life was yet in front of him similarly handicapped. The years that had rolled over the heads of the youngsters had taken with them, amongst many other things, the nicknames Skellach and Golly Michie. Rob Maclaggan and Geordie Macintaggart were now young men. They were apprentice blacksmiths, with the usual privilege of "takin' a hairst" as part of their wages. One hairst market day, Rob and Geordie both engaged to go as hairst

hands to the farm of Langlands. That was the beginning of their trouble. The end of it was this—

“Od be about me, Rob, faur in the worl’ o’ Gweed are ye gyan the nicht ’at ye’re pittin’ sic a polish on yer beets?” said Mistress Maclaggan one evening, after Rob had supped his porridge.

“Naewy particular,” said Rob.

“A ken, mither,” said wee Tammie, “he’s gyan up tae the Langlands tae see’s lass.”

Rob sent the polishing brush whirling after his little brother, who fled outside and cried in at the keyhole, “Mey Macfarlane, Mey Macfarlane.”

“A’ll Mey Macfarlane you, Tam, fan I get a haud o’ ye,” cried Rob.

“Peety me, Rob,” said Mistress Maclaggan, “ye needna get up like a madman about it.”

“Weel, fat’s he gabbin’ at?”

Rob resumed the polishing of his boots, having thoroughly enjoyed Tammie’s reference to Mey Macfarlane.

Mey was lass at the Langlands. She might have been mistress at either of several other places, but she was in no hurry, as she herself often declared, “to be fashed wi’ a man body.” She was possessed of as much beauty in her own person as is often to be found distributed amongst a dozen

considered fair to see. Weelum Docherty, the Braefoot mole-catcher, was fourscore years and some, and his thoughts had long been of the world to which his shortening steps were hastening him, but he confessed that his "auld hert ance took a terrible hunger for its youth again." The occasion was the tying on of his neckcloth by Mey Macfarlane. Her eyes, besides being blue, were full of a fatal witchery. "It's easy spikin', boys," said Tam Whyte, the Langlands foreman, who was being bantered for having succumbed to Mey's charms; "it's easy spikin', boys, but yon een!" Mey, however, exhibited no preference for either of her numerous suitors, and so it happened that they all continued to love and court her.

When Rob had finished the polishing of his boots and had made himself highly presentable generally, he stepped away to the souter's shop to pass the loitering minutes until it would be nearer the Langlands milking hour.

"Haith Rob, an' if ye're nae a buck the nicht," remarked Macwhirter.

But Rob was not the only one of Mey's admirers who was to be a "buck" that same evening, Geordie Macintaggart, was at that very moment, shaving himself for the first time in his life, and

that to the effusion of blood. No man can expect to come out of his first engagement with the razor unwounded, more especially if he lets his thoughts rant and riot as Geordie did.

"A'll meet Mey comin' fae the byre," thought he, wiping a mixture of lather and blood off his cheek, "an' A'll say, 'Hullo, Mey.' Then she'll say, 'Hullo, fat's ta'en ye up tae the Langlands the nicht, George?' 'Ou jeist tae get a sicht o' you, Mey.' Then she'll say, 'Nane o' yer flattery here, noo, George. Ye wis aye a good han' at butterin' up the lasses.' Then A'll say, 'It's as fac's A'm stanin' here, Mey.' Syne she'll say (feich, my chin! Dang that razor! it's far owre sharp)."

Here Geordie pressed the towel hard against his chin.

"Syne she'll say, 'Are ye comin' in, George,' an' A'll say, 'Na, A'll nae be comin' in, but ye'll be takin' a stap oot in a filie, Mey, efter ye sy yer milk.' Then she'll say, 'Ou ay, maybe A wull.' Syne oot she'll come in a filie an' we'll daun'er awa doon as far as Drummie's burn, an' hae a seat amon' the birks."

At this point Geordie rose from his chair, and still pressing the towel to his chin and flourishing the razor in his right hand, recited—

How Rob and Geordie came by their Limps. 199

“Ayr gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,
O'erhung with wild woods thick'ning green ;
The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar
Twined am'rous round the raptured scene.”

“A ken the very spot faur we'll sit doon,” he went on thinking, as he set himself down again in front of the looking-glass. “Then A'll pit my airm roon' 'er an' say (daggit! A've gi'en my chin a yawfu' hack tho') A'll pit my airm roon' 'er an' say ——”

Many men on these occasions utterly fail to express what they have studied carefully and as carefully rehearsed. Geordie failed even to think of what he would say at that critical moment. This deadlock in the matter of thinking, however, accelerated the practical matter of toilet, and Geordie was soon climbing the hill towards the Langlands.

In forgetting to look round when he reached the top of the brae he missed a picture.

A rare full August moon had risen. At the foot of the brae lay the sleepy village with its little church and tall poplar trees. Broad green meadows and fields of yellow corn, with here and there a sparkle and gleam of the little rivulets that stole through them, stretched away towards the shining Swift, while at every turn the huge hulking hills loomed up into the moonlit sky.

Geordie hastened on, thinking over and over

again as he went those wild and daring thoughts which had already cost him no inconsiderable quantity of his life-blood.

When about a quarter of a mile from his destination, he stopped as abruptly as if he had collided with an invisible stone dyke. He had caught sight of some one who had come by a different route, making tracks for the Langlands, a short distance in front of him.

"Maclaggan," he muttered.

Maclaggan's limp had betrayed him.

Geordie had sickening thoughts of turning back and putting up with a sore heart, but it struck him that if he took a near cut through the field of turnips and scaled the back garden wall he could yet anticipate his rival. He accordingly set off through the turnips. Rob saw the manœuvre, and taking in the situation, started to walk faster. When Geordie observed this development, he broke into a run. Rob followed suit, but feeling that if he stuck to the circuitous road he would lose the race, he jumped the fence, and, like Geordie, made for the garden wall.

Geordie reached it first, and was almost astride the top when Rob caught him by the leg.

"Let go," roared Geordie.

"Na faith A," replied Rob.

"Rob Maclaggan," said Geordie, throwing all the seriousness he was possessed off into his voice.

"A wis on the grun' afore ye," said Rob.

"Let go," repeated Geordie.

"Toss for't," said Rob.

Geordie began to kick.

"Wad ye?" said Rob and tightened his hold.

A struggle ensued, in which Geordie lost his grip and fell awkwardly on a heap of loose stones. Rob hastily buttoned his jacket and screwed on his bonnet, preparing himself for the worst, but Geordie, in prize-fighting phraseology, failed to come up to time.

He was driven home in one of Langland's carts, and Rob went for the doctor.

"Ay, it's broken," said the doctor, and proceeded to set Geordie's left leg.

I may add, although it has nothing to do with this story, that Mey Macfarlane's married name was—— neither Maclaggan nor Macintaggart.

THE END.

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